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February 18, 2008 A Reformed Biweekly No. 2834 $2.00

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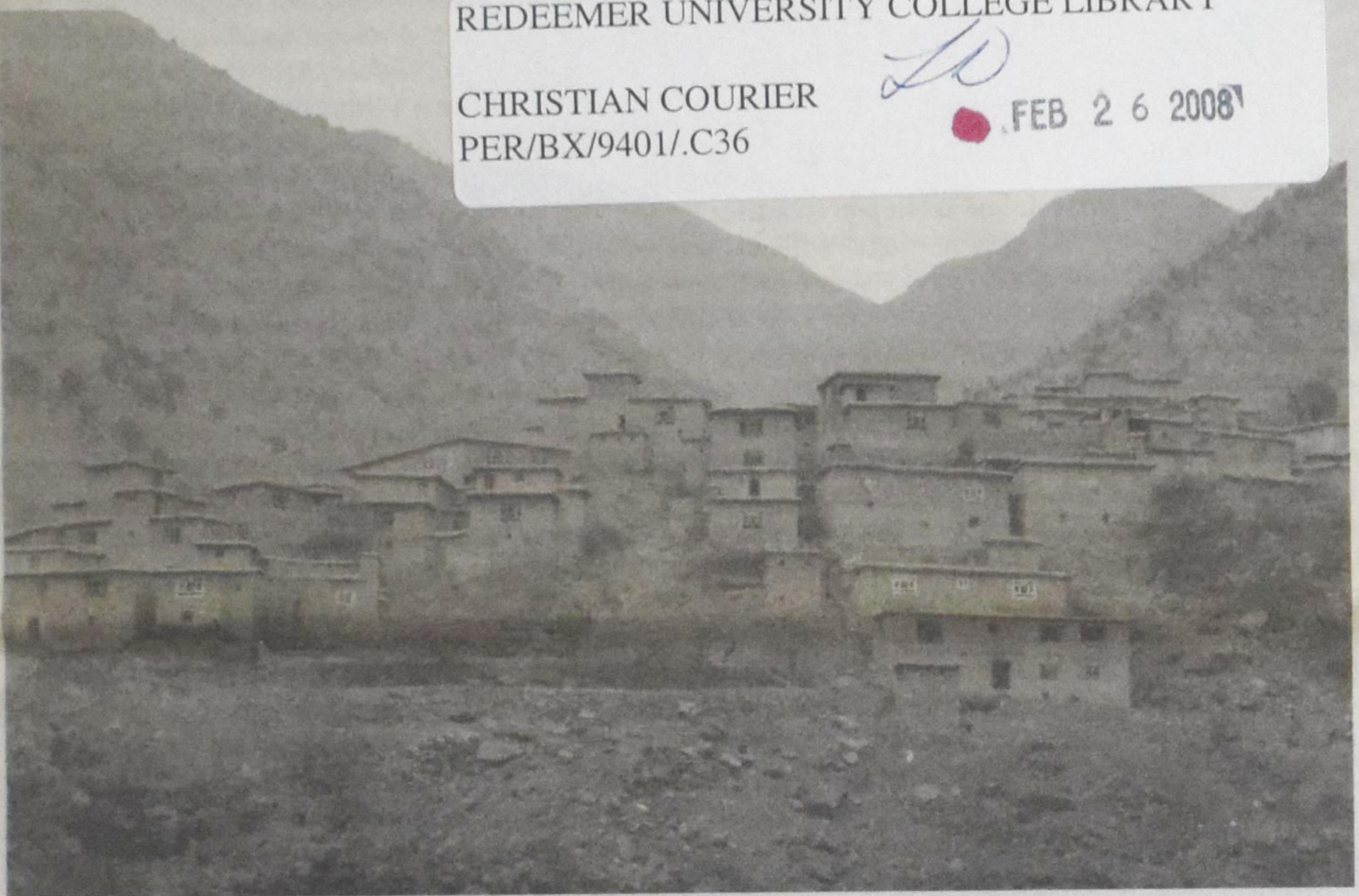

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Debating Canada's mission in Afghanistan

Harry der Nederlanden

Despite pleas from many quarters that the debate on Canada's role in Afghanistan not become politicized and partisan, and despite Stephan Dion's promise that the debate should be civilized, neither party seems to have been able to resist the temptation to engage in political posturing.

The Liberals have suddenly discovered that reducing the role of Canadian troops to a non-combat role and withdrawing them next year is a matter of principle. The Conservatives have, for what appears like political reasons, brought the issue to a head much earlier than necessary. The panel that presented the Manley report last month advised the government to postpone deliberation till after a major meeting of NATO scheduled for April. Harper chose not to.

Given the ultimatum ensconced in the Manley report and apparently adopted by the Harper government, if NATO doesn't cough up another 1,000 troops to reinforce the approximately 2,500 Canadian troops stationed in Kandahar province, Canada will cut short its involvement. In that case the entire debate would be beside the point. The fact that the Tories moved up the debate and made it a confidence vote suggests that they were eager to apply the screws to the opposition. That may have been a clever strategy, but whether it is good for the people of Afghanistan is another question.

The Tory motion would extend the Afghan mission to 2011. But Dion has been adamant that Canada pull out of its combat role in 2009. The Liberals (as of this writing) were expected to come up with a counter-proposal. Some in the party clearly do not agree with Dion's hard line. Even Dion's deputy, Michael Ignatieff, often sounds much more accommodating and ready to compromise on the issue than Dion, for the positions really are not that terribly far apart. The Liberal "amendments" would leave (some) Canadian troops in Afghanistan for another two years, but only to provide training and security. The focus would be on reconstruction and forbid Canadian troops to engage in offensive "search and destroy" missions against the Taliban. The Tory proposal isn't as open-ended as some make it out to be: it specifies 2011 as the end of the mission. And it also anticipates that there will be a gradual shift from an aggressive combat role to training, as the Afghan army takes over (hopefully).

The Liberals, according to the pundits, were working their Afghan policy up into part of an election platform in the case of a no-confidence vote and a Spring election. That would certainly politicize the issue and make compromise improbable.

Pressure for more troops

Both Canada and the U.S. are exerting pressure on other NATO countries to supply more troops and equipment. Poland has responded with an offer of helicopters and perhaps a handful of troops. Upon his return from a NATO meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania, Peter McKay reported that he had engaged the French and had hopes that they would commit troops to the mission, but he had received no firm promises. Germany has a large contingent of troops stationed in northern Afghanistan, which is relatively peaceful and stable, but it has no plans to send more troops or to cycle them into a combat role. The Afghan operation has not won much popular support in Germany.

The Canadian, British, Dutch and American contingents see much more combat. Some 80 percent of the fighting occurs in the south. But the Canadians are hardly alone in the south. Of the 43,000 troops from 39 countries that have sent troops to Afghanistan, the British (about 8,000), American (over 15,000) and Dutch (over 1,500) are amongst the largest, and they are operating in provinces immediately contiguous to Kandahar.

This summer the Canadian troops are expected to be reinforced by some 2,000 U.S. marines with combat experience in Iraq, but they will return home in the Fall. Of 26 NATO countries, 10 have contributed only token forces of 250 troops or less. Some none-NATO countries are represented by only a handful of soldiers – symbolic support.

NATO two-tiered

As the NATO debate intensified and the pressure on NATO grew, there was some backlash from countries that felt they were being accused of not doing enough. European leaders are by no means agreed on the necessity or the probable success of the NATO mission – or on the role of NATO, for that matter.

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates warned against splitting NATO into a two-tier organization – those who are willing to fight and those who are not. Such a move, he warned, would eventually destroy the alliance. Yet, there are countries that have contributed little or nothing to the operation, and that strikes other members as unfair.

Taliban resurgence

Recent reports indicate that in some areas, al Qaeda and the Taliban have revived and made strong gains. If there is a resurgence of the Taliban strong enough to drive out NATO, supporters of the mission point out, this will not only be very bad news for the people of Afghanistan, but also for Europe. Neither al Qaeda nor the Taliban is content to sit on its hands; both are intent on spreading their militant version of Islam abroad.

Gates did suggest that the recent gains by the Taliban are not as substantial as they may seem. For the most part, he said, they have been killing fellow Muslims, not NATO troops. Why that is considered less substantial is unclear to me. NATO's failure to be able to provide security for large parts of the country and to enable people in places like Kandahar to return to a normal life is of the essence.

According to the Senlis Council, a think tank that has been assessing the situation in Afghanistan, the Taliban "have a permanent presence in 54 percent of the country." While Senlis supports Manley's insistence that NATO needs to deploy more troops to make the operation work, it criticized the report for adding

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News

Archbishop controversy: does sharia have a role in Britain?

Mark Rice-Oxley

London – British deliberations on how better to assimilate the country's Muslim minority have been unsettled by the head of the Church of England, who said the application of sharia, or Islamic law, in Britain was becoming unavoidable.

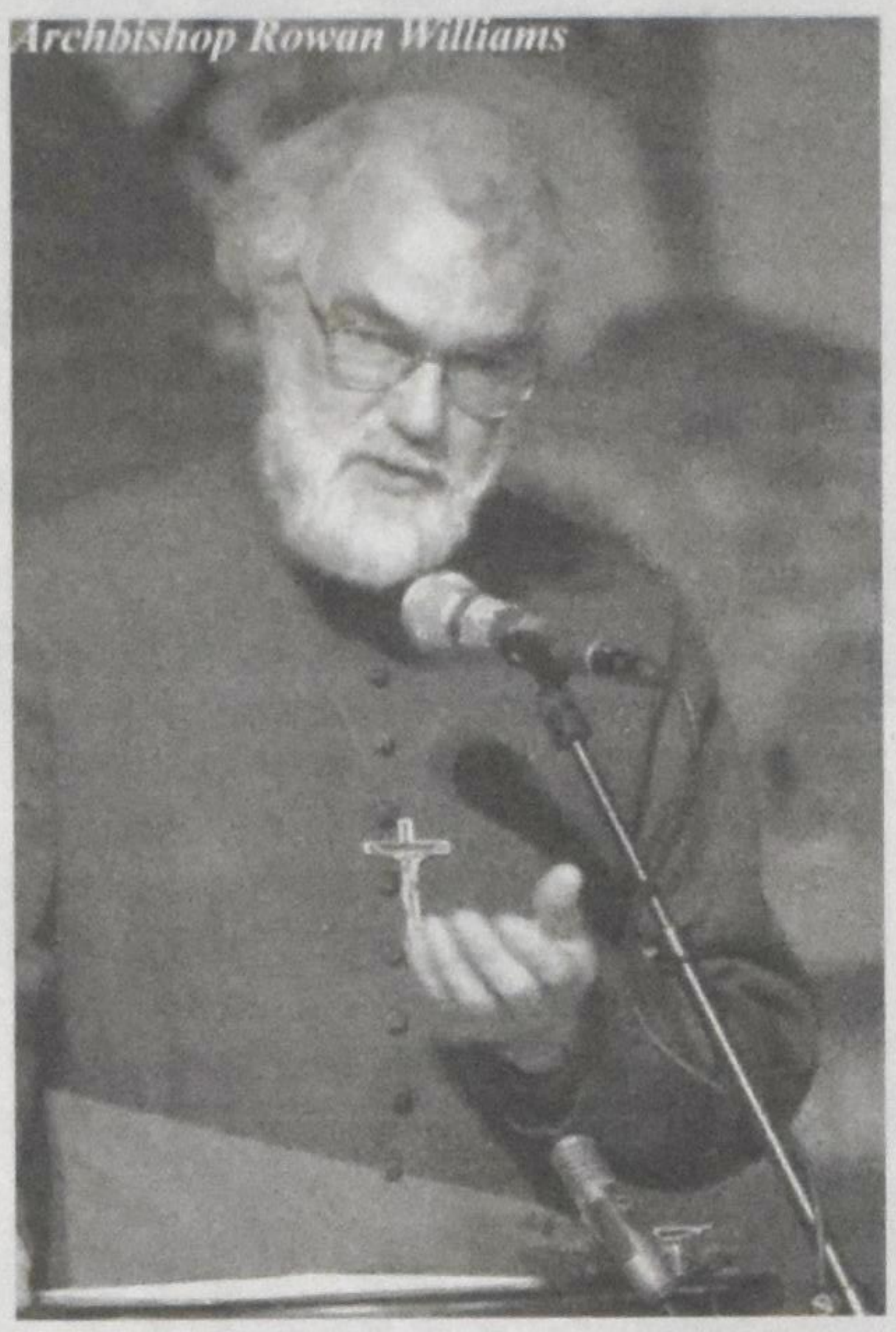
Rowan Williams's remarks have provoked a national outcry and elicited a cool response from the government, which, under Gordon Brown has been trying to reverse the tendency toward Muslim segregation.

But among British Muslims, the reaction has been far more mixed. Some, particularly women, say they don't want any kind of sharia justice in Britain. Others say an informal system of Islamic legal arbitration already functions happily alongside British common law (as do traditional Jewish tribunals).

Many praise the archbishop for thoughtfully trying to reach out across a faith divide that sharpened after the July 7, 2005, attacks, and express sadness at the knee-jerk vilification of him. "We are not calling for sharia and saying we must have it," says Raza Nadim of the mainstream Muslim Public Affairs Committee. "We welcome the debate, but it's sad that someone who is trying to help Muslims and non-Muslims integrate is being painted as the extremist."

Yunes Tainaz, a former adviser to the Lon-don central mosque, said he congratulated Dr. Williams "for his sincere and brave stand" and insisted that sharia could help social cohesion and obviate cultural anomalies like forced marriage.

"It would resist the problem of forced marriage, because Islam requires the consent of both parties," he says. Sharia, he says, provides people with a means to "work out their own way to settle a dispute in front of an agreed third party, as long as both sides agree to the process."


Archbishop Rowan Williams

Williams was under pressure Monday to clarify his Feb. 7 remarks, in which he argued that certain aspects of sharia law appeared "unavoidable" in Britain. Almost 2 million of Britain's 60 million population are Muslim, and a 40-year policy of multiculturalism has enabled them to preserve and pursue traditions largely unfettered by the secular state.

"Certain provisions of sharia are already recognized in our society and under our law, so it is not as if we are bringing in an alien and rival system," Williams said.

In comments Monday, Feb. 11 to the General Synod of the Church of England, Williams noted that some of what had been attributed to him differed from what he actually said last week, but apologized for any "unclarity."

"We are not talking about parallel jurisdictions, and I tried to make clear that there could be no blank checks in this regard, in particular as regards some of the sensitive questions about the status and liberties of women," he said.

Much of the British press reported his remarks as a defense of the more extreme manifestations of sharia justice, such as beheadings and amputations. Prime Minister Brown's spokesman said Monday that religious law "should be subservient to British criminal and civil law."

Christian leaders generally expressed regret at the remarks. One member of the General Synod, Alison Ruoff, told the BBC Monday: "There are Christians overseas in Islamic countries who cannot believe that their archbishop ... has said such a thing when they are suffering from massive persecution in Islamic countries."

Yet in some ways, Williams was merely stating the facts. Sharia courts have helped resolve divorce cases for Muslims in Britain for 25 years. A council in Leyton, east London, says it has already arbitrated in some 7,000 divorce cases, as well as in contractual, inheritance, and other disputes. The government has also adapted financial laws to make sharia-compliant Islamic banking possible.

Baroness Haleh Afshar, a peer in House of Lords and an expert in Islamic law, says there is no possibility that sharia could override British common law. She likens the system to an arbitration process that complements the law of the land. Rulings, she says, are generally binding "where they do not contravene civil law."

"The fact is that for all religious decisions, they cannot go against the civil code and civil rights, and if either party is unhappy, then they can go to a civil court," she says. "The reality is that no sharia court can allow a man to be polygamous in this country. Even if the view of the court is that men can have four wives, it cannot enforce it."

But many Muslim women shudder at the idea of turning to Islamic scholars for rulings on their private affairs. Attempts to introduce sharia-based law to settle family disputes in Canada provoked protests from women who argued that Islamic law does not view women as equal to men.

"Women have no rights in terms of divorce," says Amra, a Muslim woman who did not want to give her surname. "A man can divorce a woman, but it's much harder for a woman to divorce a man. In terms of domestic violence, it's very hard for women.

"When I worked in a women's refuge [center]," she continues, "there was a woman trying to divorce her husband, so I phoned up the central mosque to get advice, and they basically said she can't."

The problem is that there is no single form of sharia. Muslim law is not written in the Koran, but derived from it, and there are wide variations in the differing interpretations. Cassandra Balchin, a Muslim convert and spokeswoman for the Muslim Women's Network, says the interpretation being proposed in Britain is generally extremely conservative – far more so than in Muslim countries like Morocco or Indonesia.

"They talk about the woman having to ask the man for a divorce, as if women have no autonomous rights," Ms. Balchin says. Compare that with Pakistan, she adds, where the law recognizes divorce rights and where she divorced her first husband with no trouble.

"There would be no contradiction between British law and Muslim law if we take a progressive interpretation of Islamic law," says Balchin. The problem, she adds, is that this is not always the case. "They are so conservative to be dumbfounding."

Mark Rice-Oxley is a correspondent for The Christian Science Monitor

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an ultimatum. It would be irresponsible, cautioned Senlis, for Canada to withdraw from the province if the 1,000 additional troops were not forthcoming.

Lieutenant-General Michel Gautier, the Canadian soldier in charge of all overseas operations, admitted there had been setback in Kandahar last summer. The loss of ground, he said, was due to the use of inadequately trained Afghan police forces.

Since then things have improved for Canadian troops in Kandahar. There have been far fewer direct attacks; however, the use of roadside bombs has increased.

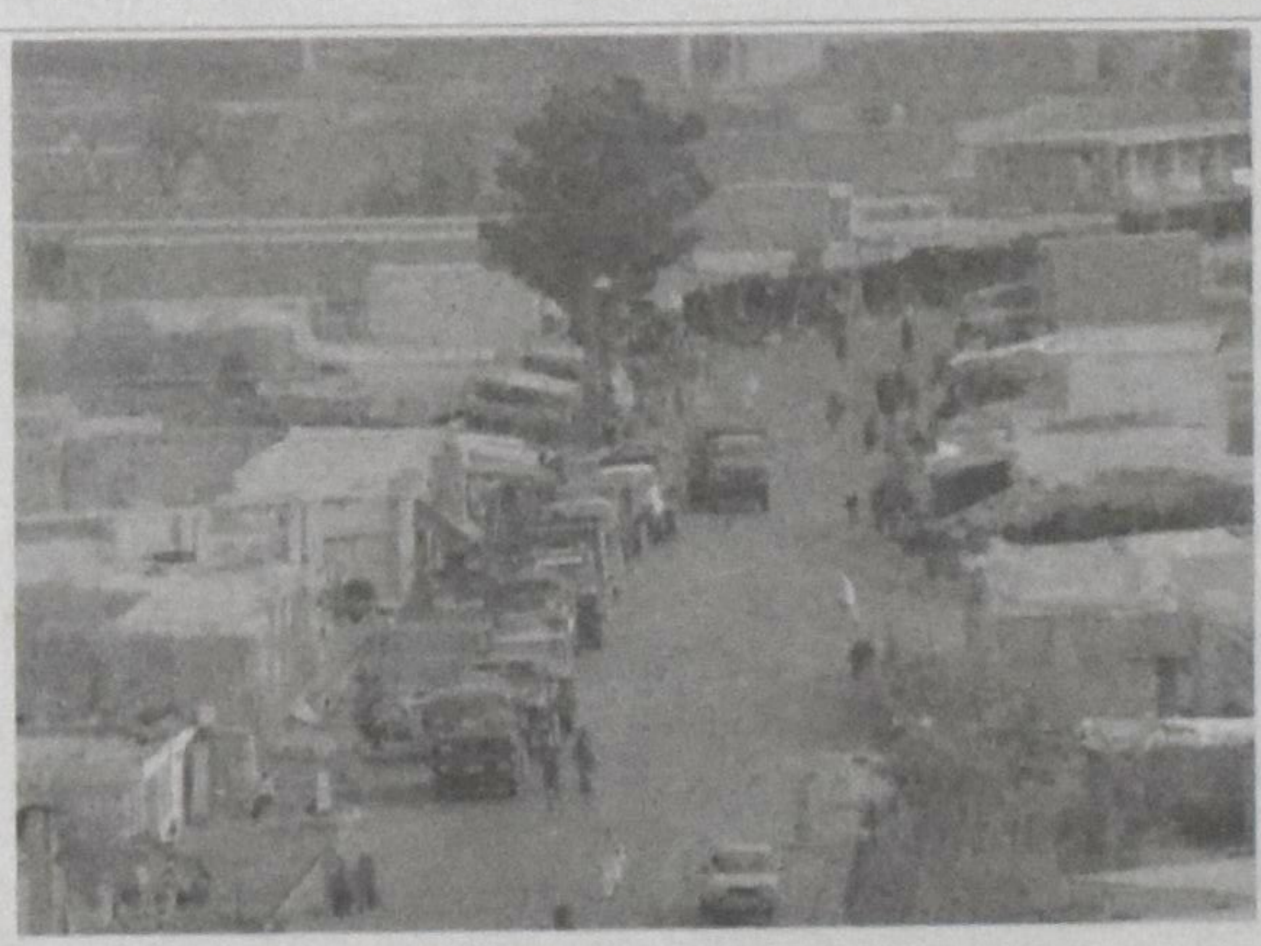
But the 2,500 Canadian troops (of which only one-third engage in actual combat) are stretched thin in an area almost the size of one-quarter of Saskatchewan with much more rugged terrain. So they must pick and choose where to focus their forces. Nevertheless, there are good signs, as in some areas farmers are returning to work their fields after having fled the fighting of the past summer.

Karzai's about-face

Brian Hutchinson of the *National Post* talked with soldiers serving in Afghanistan. They say a lot more work needs to be done in the south to provide security and normal life for the people there. Most agreed that pulling Canadian troops out of the area and restricting them to a non-combat role would be disastrous for the people and irresponsible.

However, reports Hutchinson, the people living in Kandahar city are growing impatient with NATO. The city hasn't had electricity for over two months. They want to see more done to bring life back to normal instead of chasing the Taliban. They invest little hope in the Karzai government. Government officials and the police are corrupt and they can be trusted only to look out after their own interests.

NATO leaders have also been disappointed with Afghan President Karzai recently. Before the NATO meeting in Vilnius, several months of planning was invested in setting up a high-powered U.N. official to coordinate reconstruction efforts in the country among the EU, NATO and the UN. Karzai initially approved the nomination, but did a sudden about-face. It means further delays and frustrations for those seeking to help the country get back on its feet. The about-face, it appears, was prompted by Karzai's concern about his own political future. He argued that such a super-administrator was too reminiscent of the colonial order of the past. It would not be popular among Afghans, and Karzai will have to run for re-election in the near future.



The combat – non-combat distinction

On the neat distinction between combat and non-combat roles, General Rick Hillier, Chief of Defense staff, suggested that the distinction was untenable on the ground.

Ending the combat role and focusing only on training is unrealistic, he said. "If you're in Kandahar, you're going to be in combat operations." The Taliban are going to attack you.

He also pointed out that if Canada were to withdraw to a safer area, there are no other NATO countries ready to step into its shoes. All that has been gained would then be lost.

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News

Choosing a president

Principalities & Powers

David T. Koyzis

When I was growing up near Chicago, I used to get caught up, along with my fellow citizens, in the excitement of the quadrennial presidential race. The first such campaign I remember was in 1960, when Senator John Kennedy ran against Vice-President Richard Nixon. Although I did not see the first televised presidential debate, Kennedy did score a victory over Nixon by speaking to the American people rather than to his opponent. Thus image seemingly triumphed over substance.

Nearly half a century later, I must admit to finding the entire exercise off-putting. Since the "reforms" of 35 years ago, selection of a presidential candidate no longer belongs to party regulars at the convention, but to the people in the series of state party caucuses and primary elections that are increasingly being pushed to the start of the calendar year. Although this appears to be more democratic, it has actually gone a considerable way towards eroding just governance in the US. Why?

First, it has encouraged Americans to view a prospective president as an heroic, napoleonic figure who will sweep into office and shake things up in the stale corridors of political power. The candidate promises "change" without going into too much detail as to what this implies. Because no one person can ever fulfil such exaggerated expectations, the public quickly sours on him or her, waiting for the next candidate to come along making similar promises.

Yet this scenario fails to do justice to the complexities of a real-life political system, where getting things done demands, not a well-intended Jimmy Stuart going to Washington in the style of a Frank Capra film, but genuine teamwork painstakingly cultivated by a president and like-minded members of Congress for the sake of doing public justice. It would be far better to hear from a candidate, not what she will do as president, as if she had no one else to answer to, but how she and like-minded Senators and Representatives would go about meeting the ordinary challenges of governing a country.

Take the Ron Paul phenomenon as an example. Paul has acquired a small but dedicated following, catching the imaginations of libertarians favouring a restricted reading of the Constitution. Paul favours eliminating the federal income tax, and opposes US participation in the United Nations and even NATO. He advocates abolition of many federal departments and the Federal Reserve Board, the American counterpart to the Bank of Canada. That these positions are out of the mainstream is beside the point. The fact is that Paul does not command even a modest base of support in Congress and thus has next to no chance of accomplishing his goals even if he should become president. Yet this in no way fazes him or his dedicated supporters.

Second, the current process does little in the way to eliminate candidates who are unqualified for the chief executive office. All that is necessary for a would-be candidate to win his or her party's nomination is to appeal successfully to as many people in as many states as he can, especially the most populous ones. At present there is no means of filtering out incompetents. A party is obligated to go with a candidate who has cultivated the best image in what is essentially a series of beauty contests.

In 1986, for example, in my home state of Illinois two disciples of the political extremist Lyndon Larouche won the Democratic nomination for two state offices, mostly because their names (Janice Hart and Mark Fairchild) sounded safe. Party officials were powerless to remove them from the ballot. One-time presidential candidate Al Smith was wrong when he said in 1933 that the cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy. Instead, democracy's flaws must be addressed by recognizing that it cannot be extended limitlessly.

Given what is at stake, the two American political parties would do well to rectify these defects, principally by giving primary elections an advisory status at most and by encouraging aspirants to the presidency to build a strong base of support in Congress.

David T. Koyzis teaches political science at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario, and is the author of the award-winning Political Visions and Illusions *(InterVarsity Press). His blog can be found at:* http://byzantinecalvinist.blogspot.com

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But the Liberal position is not quite as simplistic as some make it out to be. Marcus Gee of the *Globe and Mail*, for example, wrote: "So let's get this straight: Stephan Dion wants Canadian troops to stay in Afghanistan, but he doesn't want them to fight."

Well, not quite. They would be allowed to fight back if attacked, and if they accompanied Afghan troops into the field, they would certainly be attacked. However, they would no longer be sent on "search and destroy" missions, that is, they would no longer be allowed to take the fight to the enemy and attack their bases and the places where they were massing to attack.

However, Gee does make a good case that unless Canadian troops are content to hunker down far out of harm's way, the distinction that Dion has been trying to build up into a principle is very hard to sustain in the field.

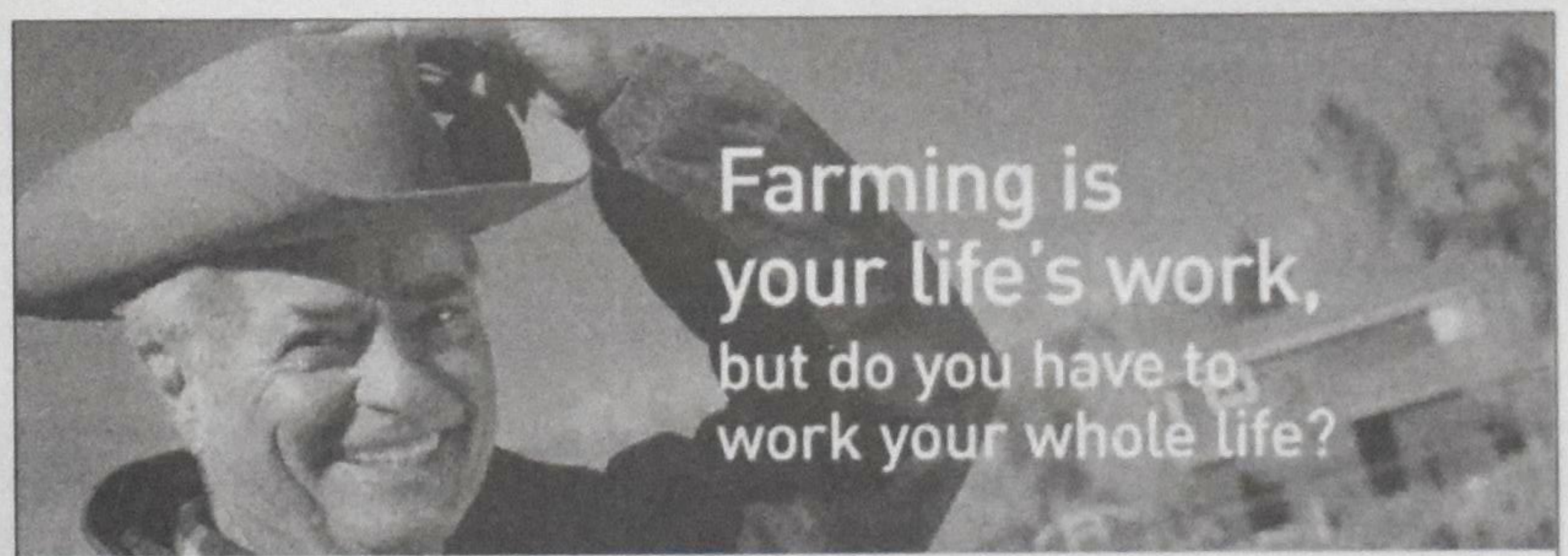
"Say the Canadians were trying to rebuild clinics and schools in a remote village," writes Gee, "and the Taliban kept burning them down, as they routinely do now? The Canadians might be able to surround and defend some of them. But you can't put armed soldiers at every one-room schoolhouse. To stop the attacks, someone would have to discourage the Taliban's predation.

"At the very least, they would have to garrison the village and fight back when it came under attack. But again, that would be prohibited combat. The Canadians would have to abandon the village and its inhabitants: the old people who used the clinic, the young girls who went to the school, the village leaders they promised to support. How would that sit with Mr. Dion's conscience?"

However, even if Canadian troops are allowed to fight another year or two, would that be enough to put Afghanistan on its feet with a viable government? In the future will Afghan troops be able to withstand the repeated attacks of an enemy motivated by religion and ideology? Will the leaders of Afghanistan be able to establish a functioning government, judiciary, and police force relatively free of corruption? Will a poor, rugged country like Afghanistan with a widely dispersed population ever have adequate resources (tax base) to maintain a large army and police force to provide security for its citizens?

There is no sure answer to any of these questions. Even after years of support from NATO in terms of troops and development, Afghanistan may not be able to do the things we expect of a government in the West. In fact, it may still fall to the growing forces of Muslim radicalism and militancy. The Afghans are a proud people, and they will not be content to watch foreign troops skirmishing across their country indefinitely.

The war against the Taliban in Afghanistan could well be an open-ended one, requiring NATO input far beyond 2009 or 2011. And even then its success is hardly assured.



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Editorial

A tribute to an old friend: R.I.P.

Harry der Nederlanden

"I liked that little Mazda hatchback," she said, as it passed us on our way to Hamilton on the QEW (Queen Elizabeth Way).

I glared at her and gave a little headshake, nodding toward the dashboard of our ageing Caravan. The open slot of the radio gave me a grim look. With the red cassette jutting out slightly, it looked ready to give me a tongue-lashing. The cassette – featuring three chipmunks singing Christmas songs – has been in the machine for a couple of years. For some reason, inserting it was the only way to get the radio working. It was like a magic switch. But it got stuck there a few months ago, and no one has been able to pry it out. No big deal, though. The radio wasn't working anymore anyway. FM gave up the ghost last year, and recently AM followed.

My headshake wasn't because I thought the cute little Mazda that my wife Rose had taken out for a test drive was badly over-priced. I thought we had an understanding that we wouldn't talk about getting another car while we were riding in our faithful old Caravan. It's 15 years old and has never left us stranded at the side of the road. It seems disrespectful to talk about replacing it while we're still riding in it. Besides, I'm just a wee bit superstitious. I was afraid that the old Dodge would overhear and konk out in the middle of the road, whether out of spite or out of a sense of betrayal.

When the year turned over from 2007 to 2008, it dawned on Rose that we were buzzing around in a 15-year-old vehicle. On our bi-weekly jaunts to the cancer center in Hamilton, she began hearing all sorts of frightening noises coming from various parts of the van. "What's that thunk? Did you hear that? It sounded like something let loose in the back."

"What? I didn't hear nothing. Just the usual thumps and bumps that you hear in an old car. You've got to expect that after 15 years."

For the last few years I've been quite successful at putting Rose's mind at rest. And for the most part the old Caravan has cooperated. If you say good things about it, it pulls itself together and it goes chugging on. It endures. You've got to love an ageing vehicle that endures. In my opinion, it's the master virtue of automobiles: a car that endures acquires heroic stature.

In fact, our Dodge Caravan may be close to acquiring saintly stature. Rather than focus on the groans, squeals and squeaks, I think we ought to focus on what it has done with unfailing loyalty since we bought it. It runs. It runs on and on.

It became part of our family 12 years ago. My ageing parents – they were in their late eighties – had come to live with us because my father had Alzheimers. So we needed a vehicle that was easy for them to get in and out of. With the aid of a small wooden box (an old kitchen drawer actually) to serve as a step, the Caravan served wonderfully well. My parents loved riding in it – it was a treat each and every time. And because they were both extremely forgetful, I could take them for a tour over the same route that I had followed only a few days earlier and they would marvel at the scenery as if they were seeing it for the first time. They were right. There are all sorts of beautiful spots in the Niagara Peninsula that are just as marvelous the seventh or the tenth time that you see them as the first. I learned that from cruising around in the old van with my parents.

Those memories are now welded into the fabric and metal of the Caravan. Every now and again, as I drive those old routes in the van, those memories come flooding back. Are those memories only in my head? I don't think so. If the old van went, I'm afraid those memories would also go with it. The psychiatrist J.H. Vandenberg recalled going back to his childhood neighborhood after years of absence. As he walked the route he followed as a kid going to and from school, he puts his finger in a groove in a wall he always passed just as he did when he was a schoolchild. And suddenly all sorts of memories came flooding back. If the wall had been dismantled, he suggests, those memories would never have returned. They were not just lodged in his mind; they were in some sense also lodged in the wall, or in the contact between his finger and the groove in the wall.

Things can acquire a patina of personhood. Since our van has been part of the family for a great many years, it has become permeated with memories and personhood. Right now it has more memories than paint. So my refusal to talk about its failings or its demise in its presence is not just sentimental silliness. You wouldn't want an old friend to hear you saying, "Boy, Pete is really beginning to show his age. His hair is getting thin and his nose is beginning to look like a potato." Well, I treat our ageing Caravan like an old friend.

I can understand, however, why Rose was becoming a little paranoid about the van. Things have been coming loose on it for quite some time. Not important things like the generator or brakes, but lots of little things. A couple of years ago something got bent in the front door on the passenger side. Jonathan, our youngest son, had been driving his friends home, and when they got out the door wouldn't latch. So they kicked it. We haven't been able to open it since.

But since there were two other doors – the driver's side and the sliding door in the back, we didn't think it was worth fixing. There was a big crack in the body beside the hinge anyway. That's probably why the door wasn't closing properly.

But a few months ago the door on the driver's side suddenly refused to close. That latch had also become bent. After a bit of nasty work with a screwdriver, I finally got the door shut. But I knew that if I opened it, getting it closed was not going to be easy; in fact, it might defeat my efforts and pop open when I made a hard right turn.

Three doors are nice to have, of course. But really you only need one door to get in and out of a Caravan because you can easily squeeze between the front seats and go through the back. You do have to be careful that your butt doesn't dislodge the rear view mirror, however.

Rose took it all in stride, I admit. And we had lots of giggles squeezing in and out of the van through the only remaining door. But gradually she began hearing all sorts of dreadful noises from different parts of the van, especially as we drove to the cancer center. She had lost faith in our loyal old Caravan.

Maybe you've heard of the hermeneutics of suspicion – that postmodern state of mind? Well, she was deep in its grip. Whereas once we lived with that stellar, saintly vehicle as if it would go on forever, now she was beginning to think that it might fall to pieces right in the middle of our busy QEW before we could make it to Hamilton. Her ears and her mind were oriented to destruction.

So a couple of weeks ago, as I was recuperating from the latest round of chemotherapy, she came inching up the driveway in a used (sorry: pre-owned) Mazda. There's a Mazda dealership that we drive by almost every day without giving it a thought. But that day she had stopped to look and ended up taking one for a test drive.

What had triggered it was a slight problem with the last functional door on the Caravan. The night before, when she climbed in to pick up our youngest daughter Pamela from the evening shift at the computer store, the sliding door refused to close behind her. No matter how hard we pulled, it wouldn't budge.

"That's what comes of talking about getting a new car while you're still in the car," I muttered dejectedly. It was clear to me that the old Caravan was losing heart. That's what happens when those you've been serving faithfully for years suddenly lose their trust in you. You become discouraged and weary. You can't summon the strength to go on. You give up.

Muttering a little encouragement to the old beast, I fetched a sturdy screwdriver and at last coaxed the door shut. But now the Caravan was growing cranky. Every time the sliding door slid all the way open, it had to be closed with a screwdriver. And, yes, it squeaked as it closed.

Rose pointed out that not only did we need three new doors, but that the muffler was beginning to grumble, that the air conditioning and heater had long ago become recalcitrant, that after my little fender-bender the front end needed a face-lift and that rust spots were showing through.

"Well, what do you expect from a 15-year-old vehicle?"

Rose just gave me a determine stare. My words no longer got through.

But I refused to look at the Mazda, especially with the old Caravan standing right there. One glance at the Mazda was enough to tell me that it didn't have the character, the heart of the Caravan.

But Rosie didn't give up. The next day she came bouncing up the driveway in a 2004 Honda CRV. I refused to go for a test drive, but at long last I began paging through the Automobile Consumer magazines, the Auto Trader and online websites. But I confess my heart wasn't in it. My sole contribution was to point out that a Ford Focus was nearly half the price of the Honda.

When Rose tried to drag me to the Honda dealer, I protested that I hadn't really done any hands-on shopping yet. So she agreed to drive me to some other dealerships. She did – the day after a huge snowstorm had passed through. Every car lot looked like row upon row of sleeping polar bears. Every car was covered with a foot of snow and the windows were frosted over so you couldn't even read the sticker price.

That's when I knew the jig was up, and I surrendered to the inevitable. Last week I rode to Hamilton in a 2004 Honda. We had music and warm feet, and I could climb in and out of the front passenger door.

But I'm still grieving for my faithful old Caravan and going through an identity crisis. I used to ride in a heroic, almost saintly, vehicle. Now I'm riding in a yuppee-mobile. It's eroding my character and my memories.

I think I'll go sit in the old Caravan a while. It's still in the driveway. I'd put it in the garage, but there's a 1974 Dodge Dart in there. But that's another story.

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Christian Courier
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Tel: (905) 682-8311; 1-800-969-4838
Fax: (905) 682-8313; Web site: www.christiancourier.ca
Publications Mail Registration No. 09375

We acknowledge the assistance of the Government of Canada, through the Publications Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs. Canadä

Peter Borgdorff to lead Reformed Ecumenical Council into merger

Grand Rapids, Mich. – Rev. Peter Borgdorff, former executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, has been named president of the Reformed Ecumenical Council, a group that represents some 39 denominations and about 12 million Christians worldwide.

Borgdorff takes over from Rev. Douwe Visser, who resigned the presidency of REC to take a position with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), based in Geneva, Switzerland. Both Borgdorff and Visser were in Grand Rapids on Monday for a special chapel service at which the transition was announced.

"This is part of something very special in the life of our church," said Rev. Jerry Dykstra, the CRC's executive director, at the start of a chapel service in the CRC's Grand Rapids office.

Dykstra noted that Borgdorff, Visser and many others had advocated and worked hard to make the merger between REC and WARC happen.

The new ecumenical body, to be called the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), will formally come into existence at an assembly set for June 2010 at Calvin College in Grand Rapids. It will represent more than 80 million Christians worldwide

Borgdorff has agreed to serve as president of REC during the next two years as the work is done to formalize the merger. He has also agreed to help write a constitution for the new organization.

"My heart breaks over the divisions that have separated us over the years. We praise God to see this kind of unity happening," Dykstra said.

Monday's chapel service celebrated the upcoming merger and also marked the start of a meeting taking place this week on the campus of Calvin College to help organize the June 2010 meeting of the WCRC.

Because of its involvement in the process leading to the decision to merge, the CRC has been named to serve as the convening denomination for the meeting, which is expected to draw hundreds of delegates from around the world.

"We are at a historic moment in the life of Reformed churches all around the world. We are beginning that today in this chapel," said Setri Nyomi, general secretary of WARC. Nyomi was in town to help lay the groundwork for the meeting in 2010.

The decision to merge REC, which is based in Grand Rapids, and WARC came after several years of discussions. At a meeting last year in Trinidad, WARC agreed to recommend to REC that the new global entity be called the World Communion of Reformed Churches. REC had already agreed to the merger at a meeting in South Africa. The new organization will represent nearly 230 churches in more than 100 countries.

"Coming together like this is an example of where the ecumenical movement is going today. It eliminates some of the visible separation and emphasizes what we can do together," said Borgdorff.

Besides the traditional Reformed churches, the WCRC will be open to Presbyterian, Congregational, and other denominations with a Reformed heritage, he added. "I have found over the years that the commonalities among us **to be** much greater than those things that we think divide us," said Borgdorff.

Richard Van Houten, general secretary of REC, said that the organization's executive committee met last week in Indonesia. After they accepted Visser's resignation, they nominated and elected Borgdorff as the new president.

"The committee felt that he was the best person to step into the leadership role for the next two years of intensive interaction on our way to this new body," said Van Houten, who attended the chapel service in Grand Rapids.

Visser has been appointed as Secretary for Theology and Ecumenical Engagement for WARC.

Chris Meehan, CRC Communications

Re: Who killed Aqsa Parvez?

I believe we should realize that there are thousands of non-radical muslims in Canada. How these people try and explain radical muslim activities may be better understood when we try and compare how "non radical" Christians explain "radical" christian behaviours.

An example of radical Christians could include President Bush supported by the Christian Right, in that he destroyed a few countries in response to one terrorist attack. Other examples include Northern Uganda where Kony uses biblical references to explain why it is necessary to kill his own people, since they have – in his view – failed to support his cause. Another example of "Radical Christianity" is Serbia where thousands of Muslims disappeared. We are often quick to explain such actions to conditions outside the church but that the Bible does not condone violence.

Our Media normally does not report groups that offer moderation and that do not agree with Radical groups. Both Muslim groups and Christian groups who offer other types of solutions to conflicts go unnoticed in the press.

As humans we all have terrible problems with our sinful nature and we all need forgiveness.

August Guillaume

CALVIN INSTITUTE OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP
for the study and renewal of worship

Calvin Institute of Worship receives grant

The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship has received a $7 million grant for worship renewal locally, nationally and internationally

The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship is set to embark on its second decade of programming with new opportunities to shape national and international conversations about Christian worship practices.

And it will use a new $7 million grant from the Lilly Endowment to do so. Institute director John D. Witvliet said that Calvin's Worship Institute was first funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., an Indianapolis-based private philanthropic foundation, in 1998 and has received significant funding from Lilly Endowment ever since. "We are deeply grateful for this generous support," said Calvin College President Gaylen Byker. "It enables us to live out Calvin's commitment to contribute to vital Christian practices in a variety of settings across North America and beyond."

This most recent grant, which takes effect this month, will enable the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship to build on what it has learned as it looks at the future of Christian worship.

"In our culture," Witvliet said, "it's so tempting for worship to be celebrity driven on the one hand, or to simply continue passively on automatic pilot on the other. We are eager to support and encourage the thousands of Christian leaders in all kinds of congregations that work to resist those temptations."

But, Witvliet added, the CICW does not want to be defined by what it is against. Instead the CICW has postulated a sort of worship 10 commandments, what it calls its "10 core convictions about worship." These are items, Witvliet said, that focus squarely on the core of authentic, meaningful Christian worship, and call congregations to ask better questions about what they are trying to accomplish in worship.

In the 10 years of its existence, the Worship Institute has given more than 450 grants to congregations and other groups interested in worship, welcomed over 15,000 people to its conferences and training events, welcomed guests from over 40 countries, and produced more than 30 books and an extensive website (www.calvin.edu/worship) – all in partnership with more than 70 current and former Calvin College faculty and staff, over 300 other conference presenters and writers, and over two dozen other ecumenical organizations, publishers, colleges, denominations, and seminaries.

But the institute, Witvliet stressed, is about more than raw numbers, including the recent $7 million grant. "We are much more interested in having a single congregation discover the life-changing joy and profound significance of authentic Christian worship than simply perpetuating conferences and publications for their own sake. All of our work is directed toward renewed vitality in Christian worship and living."

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(ISSN 1192-3415) Published biweekly on Mondays.

Address all correspondence to: 5 Joanna Dr, St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1
Tel: 905-682-8311 or 1-800-969-4838, or fax: 905-682-8313
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PRINTED IN CANADA

Being church

On the tension between institution and relationship in the church

Pete Vander Beek

A war-dead Daddy present only in photographs and memorabilia, an overprotective Mommy, and a school that chastises creative individuality in a lonely boy – in fact grinds individuality away – are "bricks in the wall" of non-relationship, of non-connection in the song "The Wall" by Pink Floyd. In this year's ICS Worldview conference titled "Another Brick In The Wall" the question of how the institutionality of the church (*or, the church in institutional form*) is a brick-in-the-wall barrier for younger generations and the unchurched was a major theme. Attendees learned that post-moderns view or experience church as just as non-relational as school and other aging modern institutions. And they profess to want relationship above all, yet don't know how it exactly works well.

The day began with the worship band playing their rendition of the Pink Floyd song, and leading in worship. The conference's opening prayer included a request that God give us a sense of "humble boldness" that would help us re-examine things.

Keynote Speaker Bob Sweetman had been dragged out of the halls of academe to share with a broader audience his insightful information on the subject. That was worthwhile. He gave a historical framework out of which we could understand the issues. He first got us thinking about two kinds of institutions: those that are aggressively expanding, massive, complex (so big we can't find who's responsible for what), uncaring (impersonal) yet unavoidable if you want to have the service they provide. He contrasted those with institutions which arise out of shared interests, where one's participation makes them what they are, such as volunteer organizations, mall culture, ethnic celebrations, neighbourhoods and family. We tend to be most suspicious of the first kind, which included big government, big labour, big academies of learning, and big, distant, church bureaucracies. The second type of institution, which has a more organic feel to it, is fading away and leaving nostalgic memories that have an Amish charm to them, Sweetman told us.

He presented two theses. First that our Social Institutions and habitual arrangements are ill-fitted to life today. Second, that "our habits, practices and institutions were largely forged in a world we increasingly experience as past, to purposes we no longer remember or have become embarrassed about." He pointed out that when those who operate within an institution experience this loss of understanding why it exists, the focus changes to preserving power, to preserving the institution. He had a difficult time saying this, because he professes to be someone who loves many of our old institutions.

He then defined two key words for us, preparation for hearing a chapter story of history. He said "Institutions preserve for us default patterns of social and cultural practices and so save energy...and preserve continuity from generation to generation." They provide a "hardened consensus around rules for a particular functioning." He helpfully encouraged us to consider what a blessing it is to not have to keep re-establishing the rules. A valuable example was a group of children in a playground who dialogue together to make up a game and create rules for it. That set of rules becomes an institution for them, and once everyone knows them, the game can go well. The challenge, as came out in later discussion, is how to incorporate new children into the game, children who were not there to participate in institutionalizing the rules.

The second definition we were given was of Ideology, which Sweetman defined as a vision for all of life that was recognizable, just as we may observe a behaviour and say it is "typical CRC" because we know the ideology. Ideology can be drawn from many sources, such as religion, poetry, philosophy, science and folklore. Ideology is arranged and expressed as if deducted from a single guiding idea, such as a Marxist, capitalist or neo-Calvinist Ideology.

Sweetman led us through recent history, beginning in the time period he specializes in, the Middle Ages. He explained how that period was one in which the (Western) World changed from having had One Emperor and One Church to having multiples of both. Competition between rulers and churches became the norm. Human reason had sharpened, and attempts were being made by each Ideology in that competitive atmosphere to develop a total vision of life. By the 1850's we had a world in which many differences existed side by side, said Sweetman.

In such an Ideological age, competitive institutions such as the Catholic and Protestant churches organized themselves to defend against ideological attack. We were told they were "coercive, to ensure solidarity internally" and were externally expansive, attacking in search of victory.

These institutional systems, said our instructor, were "saturated by and based on one common ideology" such as Communism, Catholicism, Liberal Capitalism and Calvinism. In the Netherlands of Europe this came to be called "Pillarization" where each ideology had its own institutional expressions in areas like politics and labour etc. Sweetman called this time, from 1850 to 1950, "The most sophisticated age of Ideology"

Twice that day three panelists were brought forward to share some thoughts and interact with what Bob Sweetman had said to that point, and the gathered were also given a chance to interact with the panelists. These panel interaction times were a very stimulating time, balancing lecture and interactivity very nicely.

We next heard "Post-Ideological Culture" explained. It was described by Prof Sweetman as "incredulous, sensitive to power and its abuses, and liquid in its outworking." It found its strongest expression on the new Continent, where there was a sense that possibilities on the Frontier were unlimited, that it was a place "to construct one's own life" freer from institutional constraint than in Europe. By the 1950's the world had seen what extremes aggressive and expansive Ideologies could bring. There was also a loss of sense that we could find "an appropriate way to be human together." Though the pillarized institutions remained, those in them began to lose touch with their purposes. Sweetman said "when the thought behind the old institution is lost, even in those in it, then it merely becomes about power." The implication your writer heard there is that the institution begins to live to justify its own existence and to maintain its power. This behaviour then would increase scepticism towards institutions by those outside of them.

After lunch the question was put to us: "Does the church experience what we are talking about?" Do we ourselves recognize an ambivalence to institutions in our world today? Examples were shared of young people today for whom "everything they prize about the experience of church is about the people" and "everything they dislike about the experience of church is about the institution."

As the Christian Reformed Church turns the corner heading into its 151st year, this question may well be the most important one to answer if the church is to have children and grandchildren.

I am grateful to the ICS and Prof Sweetman not only for this opportunity to learn about the trends in society that shaped my own worldview, but also for putting this crucial question out to us. Over the course of the day I realized that my view of "the Wall" of institutional thinking was shaped by having grown up playing with Lego blocks. Any wall, or anything you built could be broken down and rebuilt in a different form using the same components. So I presume that is possible with institutions as well. Yet in my life I keep running up against an institution that acts as if the Wall called Reformed is fixed, permanent.

As was admitted in the discussions that day, fear is often our first response when confronted with the question of reforming the institution to fit our current cultural context. Our second response tends to be to want to defend the institution. All that most of us growing up in the Christian Reformed branch of the church universal in the last 50 years learned to say in such situations was written and shaped in the Ideological age we learned about at the conference. It was designed to defend against and attack the 'outsiders' and convince or coerce them into our view. When we try that technique today with those who were born in the last 30 years into the CRC, and especially with the unchurched – who might not even really have any idea who even Jesus is – we find that most of them don't respond as we hope or expect. The key is that when we approach such questions ideologically we don't build relationship, and authentic relationship is generally what those born since the 80's in North America are looking for. It is also what our Discipler Jesus was good at. I want to learn more how to do it his way. I want to be part of breaking down the walls of institutionalism that keep us from relating authentically to each other and our Lord.

Reflections on "The Wall"

Some reflections on the Pink Floyd song "The Wall" which set the theme for the lectures.

Another Brick in the Wall Part 1 (Waters) 3:41

Daddy's flown across the ocean
Leaving just a memory
Snapshot in the family album
Daddy what else did you leave for me?
Daddy, what'd'ja leave behind for me?!?
All in all it was just a brick in the wall.
All in all it was all just bricks in the wall.

Daddy flew across the ocean to defend his "Brittania" ideology against enemy ideology and died doing so, leaving a wife and son, and some memorabilia. But his ideologically driven war left a multiple vacuum in the boy's life, a vacuum which became a brick wall that blocked him from relating well.

Another Brick in the Wall Part 2 (Waters) 3:56

We don't need no education
We don't need no thought control
No dark sarcasm in the classroom
Teachers leave them kids alone
Hey! Teachers! Leave them kids alone!
All in all it's just another brick in the wall.
All in all you're just another brick in the wall.

Another set of bricks was the boy's negative experiences in a school system inhospitable to a creative, lonely boy. It was in fact abusive and intent on forcefully indoctrinating its cultural perspective into children.

The accumulation of bricks in the wall creates a person trapped behind a wall of impersonal relationships.

Comfortably Numb (Gilmour, Waters) 6:49

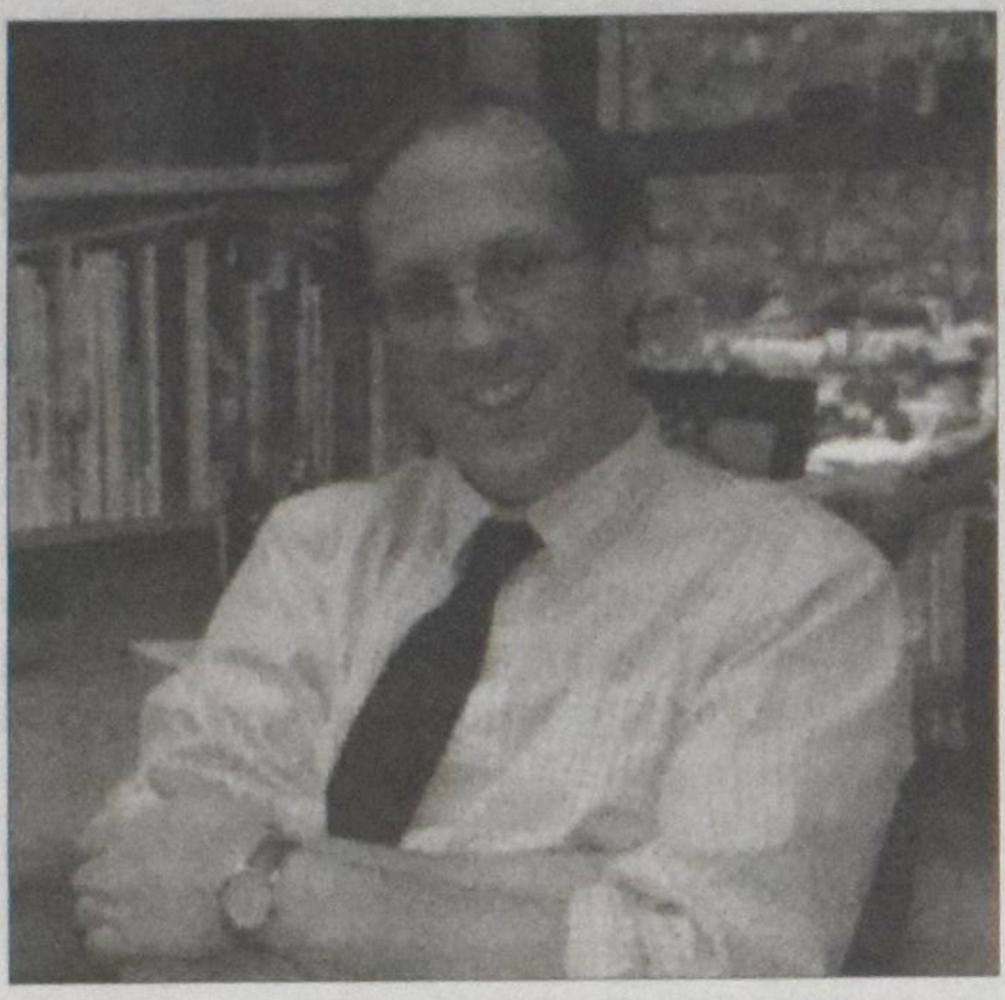
Is there anybody in there?
Just nod if you can hear me.
Is there anyone at home?
....
Your lips move but I can't hear what
you're saying.
When I was a child
I caught a fleeting glimpse
Out of the corner of my eye.
I turned to look but it was gone
I cannot put my finger on it now
The child is grown,
The dream is gone.
I have become comfortably numb.

Here the speaker is caught up in the machinery of anti-ideology ideology, doing violence to himself and others in a system very much like the one his father went to

See **Tension** *on page 8*

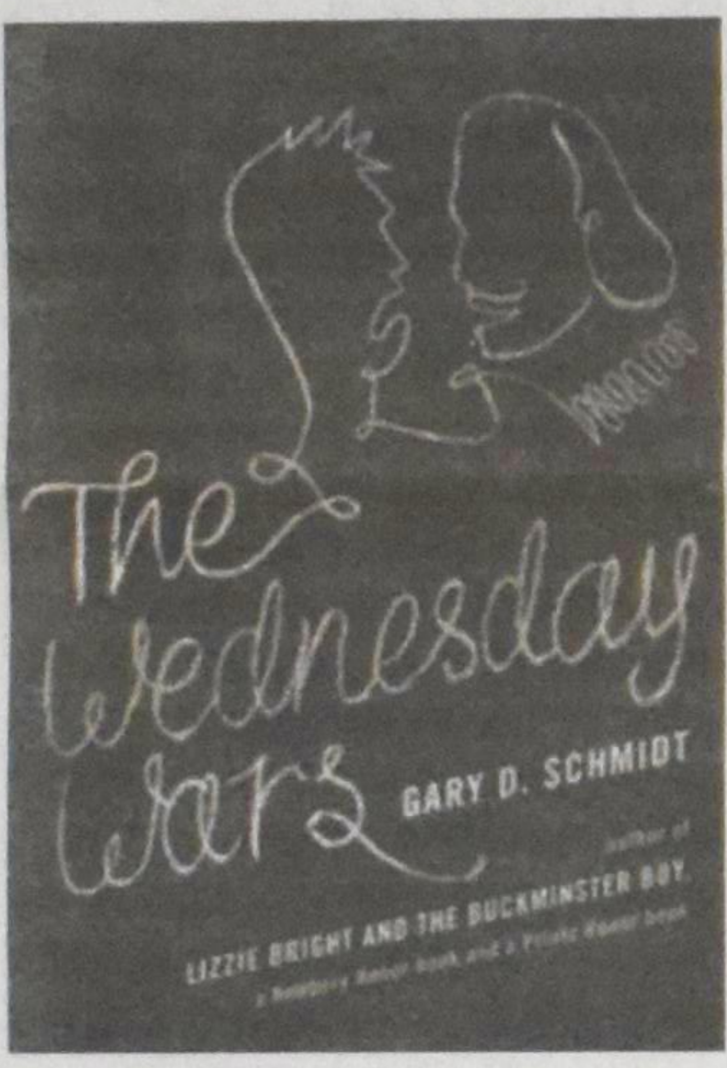
Stewardship

Calvin professor earns Newberry Award, one of literature's highest awards



Calvin College – A Calvin College professor of English recently received one of the most prestigious national literary awards in the field of children's literature.

Gary Schmidt's latest young adult novel, *The Wednesday Wars* (Clarion Books, 2007), was named a 2008 John Newbery Honor Book by the American Library Association (ALA). Schmidt also received the honor award in 2005 for his novel Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy.



"It was a different feel," says Schmidt. "The first time around you feel, 'Wow, this is amazing,' as you're getting a different recognition than you've ever gotten before.… It's an affirmation of the work you do. It was a quieter sweetness."

The Wednesday Wars, set in 1967, tells the story of Holling Hoodhood, a seventh-grade Presbyterian whose classmates are all Jewish or Catholic. Holling is forced to spend every Wednesday afternoon with his teacher, Mrs. Baker, while all his peers attend Hebrew school or catechism. The title refers to the "war" that develops between student and teacher (who could have two hours off each Wednesday afternoon were Holling not in her class) and also to the larger war that serves as the backdrop of the novel.

"The book begins with my own time growing up during the war in Vietnam. Society was really decaying," says Schmidt.

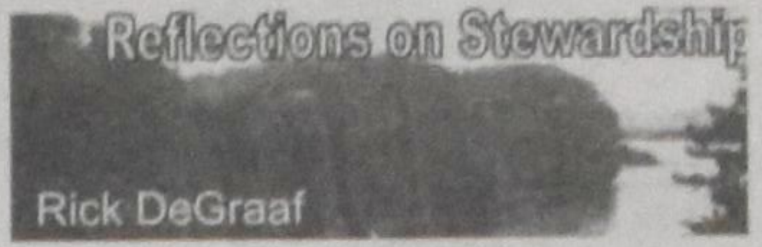
The Wednesday Wars is directed toward young adults who, according to Schmidt, are living in an era that aligns, yet greatly differs, with Schmidt's adolescent experience. In his literature, Schmidt likes to ask the questions that adolescents are asking to discover their identities.

Schmidt received the news of his latest Newbery honor at the North Bridge Inn in Concord, Massachusetts during his annual New England Saints Interim, a January class that explores the historical settings of American literature. He and his wife, Anne, called their children back home, then celebrated with the students.

"The students had bought us a cheesecake, and we went down to the Old North Bridge there and reenacted the battle. And that was our celebration."

Schmidt's next novel, *Trouble*, due in March, is a tragedy-romance based in 1976 about the relationship between two neighboring Massachusetts towns – one of the established middle-class and the other of Cambodian refugees.

We can, but should we?



People who live in poverty are limited in the choices that they can make. In desperation they may do things they know are wrong, things they don't want to do but given their hunger and hopelessness feel there is no other way.

A sure indicator of being better off or affluent is the amount of choice we have in our lives. When I got up this morning, I could choose to bathe or shower with water set to the temperature of my choosing. When I reach into my closet I have several choices as to what to wear. In the kitchen I have choices as to what I may have for breakfast and even a few options as to where I might choose to eat it. When I go to work, I may choose to drive myself, take my bicycle, a bus or opt for the car pool. I have options and the means to pay for them.

People of more limited means or living in poverty have few choices. They live in the less attractive poorer end of town or in crowded low-income housing. If they drive, they drive old beaters that are often costly to run – but that's all they can afford.

When you've made it and the mortgage is paid off you have more discretionary income – income that doesn't already have a prior commitment to meet. You can now choose to eat out at costly places, choose luxury options over practical ones, take in expensive vacations and may even decide to upgrade to a larger home and drive a more expensive car. You can. You have the resources – it's really up to you!

And why not, as so many are saying today, after all "you've earned it" and worked hard to be where you are at today. But really, as Christians we need to realize that though the message is often heard it is also a very dangerous one – a message that Satan enjoys watching us trip over.

Think about it for a moment: Is your success really a credit to you or did God have a hand in it? Consider that God, being who he is, has the most choice of all and he chose to bless his people – each differently to be sure – but blessed according to his choosing. But he does not do so willy-nilly – he has something in mind. He has purposes in mind and we need to be very careful if we think it's so that we can live a 'royal' life on earth while there are many others who are suffering. We are all part of a worldwide church – a body that has many parts that suffer. Just as our whole body feels the pain of a cut finger, we too need to have empathy for those who suffer.

Here are some points to reflect on regarding making choices:

- With choices come responsibilities: "…From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded…" (Luke 12:48).
- When we are wealthy we may be tempted to put our security in that wealth rather than in the God who entrusted it to us. We may build bigger barns (securities) instead of being generous and bearing God's purposes in mind [Luke 12:6-21].
- God's blessings to us are a test of our stewardship (see the parable of the talents Matt. 25:14-30).
- We are all part of a community some of whose members are suffering. When one part suffers we all feel the pain (1Cor. 12:26). The Christian community should be a community that cares and shares (Acts. 2:44-47).
- Contentment and happiness are not dependent on wealth (Prov. 30: 7-9) rather they come from having the right attitude about wealth or the lack of it.
- Keeping a "Kingdom first' perspective helps guide our choices – not as a way of leveraging God or paying dues that allow us to feel justified in indulging. Instead it is a perspective of generousity and willing sacrifice.
- Some extravagances are simply 'sinful' and may distract or hold us back from a more contented life in the service of God's Kingdom.
- Ask instead What-Would-Jesus-Do (WWJD)

The challenge of the affluent life is that we have the freedom to make choices that are both wasteful and contribute little if anything for the Kingdom. I know I have made bad choices in the past and still make them from time to time. I do regret that, and I know I need to repent of that and be more Kingdom-driven to make the most of the stewardship of my time, talents and wealth. May God bless each one of us in our struggle to be more like Jesus and enable us to be a blessing to all whose lives we have the privilege of touching as well as those beyond us in a hurting world. We are a community that can respond and we should!

Stewardly tip: How much do I need? It's RRSP season and the media is busy spinning the tale: buy, buy, buy! How much should you put away for the future? How much will you need? One way to get peace on this is to get help from a Christian adviser. Seek out an advisor who has no hidden agenda or will benefit from endorsing their particular financial products. Providing professional and impartial financial advice on planned giving and estate planning is the 'main-thing' we do at CSS and we do so on behalf of over 40 charities – many that you support. See below for more information.

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Day 1– Light

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario
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Church

Churches destroyed in Shari'ah state during wave of religious violence in Nigeria

Michael Ireland

NIGERIA (ANS) – Around 1,000 people were displaced, several critically wounded, and every church reportedly destroyed in Shira Yana, Bauchi State, Nigeria on February 2, 2008. This is the latest in a series of recent incidents of religious violence in northern and central Shari'ah states.

According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), the violence erupted after a young woman was accused of blaspheming against the prophet Mohammed.

Citing local sources, CSW says the young woman had apparently spurned the advances of a young Muslim man on the previous day. In a last effort the man appealed to her to speak to him "in the name of the Messenger" to which she responded that she knew no messenger.

On the following morning the youth attacked her house accompanied by a crowd, claiming that she had blasphemed against the prophet Mohammed. When the girl fled to a police station for protection, a pursuing mob proceeded to set fire to the building. Policemen responded by firing live ammunition, killing a young man in his 20s and triggering a rampage in which police and Christian targets were attacked and their homes and churches destroyed.

CSW says tension is also mounting in Kano State, where around 200 Shari'ah police or Hisbah were reported to have patrolled the streets of the Christian area of Sabon Gari in Kano City during the evening of February 1.

A CSW report states: "They were armed with an array of weaponry, including bows, arrows, sticks and machetes. Around 70 women are said to have been detained during this operation, allegedly for involvement in prostitution. However, a local journalist saw at least one woman held in chains and being punished. He reported this was a result of her refusal to divulge unspecified information. The operation took place despite a 2007 Supreme Court ruling against the use of Hisbah and a warning by Kano State Police Command that Hisbah activities were unconstitutional."

CSW adds that the move by Kano State authorities to enforce a decision taken in November 2007 to demolish four church buildings in Kano City without discussion or compensation has also added to tension in the area. The demolition was supposedly to make way for the construction of roads and a hospital.

Elsewhere, CSW says a Baptist church and a Deeper Life church were set ablaze in the Angwan Pama area of Shendam in predominantly Christian Plateau State on January 31. A car owned by a local Christian that was parked close to the churches was also destroyed in the blaze. Then on February 1 reports began to filter through indicating that six Christian-owned houses had been razed to the ground in Mavo, in the Wase Local Government Area of southern Plateau State.

Engineer Samuel Salifu, General Secretary of the Christian Association of Nigeria, told Christian Solidarity Worldwide that his organization commended the speed with which the governor of Bauchi had moved to ensure that the injured would receive treatment, churches would be rebuilt and the victims were compensated. He added that he hoped other governors would adopt a similar response in the event of outbreaks of religious violence.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide's Advocacy Director, Tina Lambert, said: "This recent wave of violence in central and northern Nigeria is disturbing, and we can only hope it does not indicate an upsurge in religious violence during 2008. While it is particularly encouraging to hear that the Bauchi State authorities have moved swiftly to assist victims of the recent violence, this has not always been the case elsewhere. Thus while commending the Bauchi State authorities, we continue to urge all state governments and the federal authorities to consistently deal with each situation in a timely and sensitive manner and to deliver justice and adequate compensation for all concerned. We particularly call on Kano's state government to end the use of the Hisbah and disband them, in line with the Supreme Court ruling."

CSW is a human rights organization which specializes in religious freedom, works on behalf of those persecuted for their Christian beliefs and promotes religious liberty for all.

Michael Ireland, Chief Correspondent of ANS, is an international British freelance journalist who was formerly a reporter with a London newspaper and has been a frequent contributor to UCB Europe, a British Christian radio station.

Orissa Christian refugees say they are now in an 'open prison'

Anto Akkara

Barakhama, India (ENI) – "Sir, we are in an open prison. Kindly do something about us," pleaded Chabil Digal, a member of a Pentecostal church, from the Christian refugee camp in the troubled Kandhamal district of eastern Orissa state.

"We are getting food. But, we cannot go to work, our children do not go to school," lamented Digal. Security personnel guarding the relief camp do not allow the inmates to move out, citing their own safety.

More than 1500 Christians in Barakhama have taken shelter in the refugee camp at a dilapidated school building following violence Christians say was orchestrated against them across the Kandhamal district from December 24.

Many attacks on Christian targets were reported across Kandhamal, but Barakhama recorded the worst incidents, with residents saying more than 350 Christian houses were set on fire and looted by Hindu extremists. That was after a Hindu was killed when Christians fought pitched battles with Hindus who had tried to destroy the church building belonging to the Church of North India in the heart of Barakhama town. Christians said they were forced to flee to nearby jungles.

In recent years, local Christians say they have been subjected to a determined campaign carried out by Hindu extremist groups led by Swami Lakshmananda Saraswati who has his base in the Kandhamal district. This is seen to have followed a substantial increase in the number of Christians by as much as 60 percent in 20 years to more than 100,000 in Kandhamal and now accounting for 20 percent of the population of the district.

Local Christians have said those vehemently opposed to them have regularly carried out marches threatening them to "reconvert or quit" the place as "India belongs to Hindus only".

On December 24, Hindu groups were said to have provoked Christians into a street fight at Bamunigam by destroying Christmas decorations. On the same day there was an altercation with the Swami at a narrow road crossing in a Christian majority Dasingabadi village. The clash was over the right of passage between the Swami's car and bus driven by a Roman Catholic. This was viewed as an "assault" on the Swami and triggered attacks on Christian targets during the Christmas period across Kandhamal.

Swami pictured in hospital after "assault"

Then the situation in Barakhama turned worse after Christians retaliated.

Local Hindus said, however, they do not share the views of the extremists nor did they support the assault on Christians. Some of them later apologised to Christian priests and said they had been coerced to join the attacking mobs.

The government has started to distribute aid to homeless Christian families to rebuild their houses, but a CNI member, Binapackiam Digal, told Ecumenical News International that some extremists were preventing the Christians from rebuilding their homes.

"Now, they're claiming we do not own the land where we have lived for years and cannot rebuild our houses on the same spot," noted Digal, referring to local inhabitants known as Hindus. He said that instead of asserting the right of Christians to rebuild their houses, the government was suggesting they move to different areas.

"If we are scattered, we will be more vulnerable," warned Digal. "How long we can live like this?"

Tension *. . . continued from page 6*

fight. He lives "Comfortably numb" and even more disconnected, longing for something authentic the child in him remembers. But he has become part of a system that keeps going, a show that must go on. He struggles to find a way out, a way of being a human with a soul again. His struggle gets him in trouble with the system.

The Trial (Waters, Bob Ezrin) 5:16

Good morning, Worm your honor.
The crown will plainly show
The prisoner who now stands before you
Was caught red-handed showing feelings
Showing feelings of an almost human nature;
This will not do.

Call the schoolmaster!

His attempts to break down the wall to discover his own feelings have made the speaker cause turmoil for those around him.

The album leaves us with a picture of hearts trying to connect around, over, under or through the walls that exist. It is an encouraging picture for anyone walled in. It says there are people waiting to really love you outside the wall.

I am of the middle-aged generation. A Boomer. I believe something relational in my CRC ancestors died as they fought wars and battled to establish ideologies. An aspect of human relationship was lost in their regimental systems as they were implemented among us. My children's generation have picked up on that somehow, and in a world that moves faster and faster and puts relationship-blocking bricks up faster than we can sometimes set them aside, my generation would do well to abandon the comfortable numbness of overly institutionalized "Churchianity" to pay attention, to focus on relationship, as Jesus did. We'll have a good time then son, you know we'll have a good time then.

The last line/quote is of course from "Cat's in the Cradle" by Harry Chapin, except I deliberately used "son" instead of "Dad." That song touches on a similar theme.

Christian leaders lament poverty in oil-rich Nigeria

Obed Minchakpu

Abuja (ENI) – Church leaders in Nigeria say urgent government action is needed to tackle poverty in the West African nation that was ranked 158th out of 177 countries in the human development index of the United Nations Development Program.

"Nigeria is blessed with abundant oil wealth, but her people are suffering in the midst of plenty," the Anglican bishop of Nigeria's commercial capital of Lagos, Adebayo Akinde, said in an interview with Ecumenical News International.

Statistics from the Central Bank of Nigeria indicate that about 54 percent of the nation's 140 million people live in poverty, many living on less than one US dollar a day.

The Roman Catholic bishop of Abeokuta in southwestern Nigeria, Alfred Adewale Martins, said the government needed to pay greater attention to the welfare of the poor.

"The most vulnerable in the country today are the poor," said Martins. "Our government most look into their plight and address this issue of poverty-stricken-people in a country like ours that is rich with oil resources."

The UN's Human Development Index measures life expectancy, literacy, education, the standard of living, and the Gross Domestic Product per person for countries worldwide.

The 2007/2008 development index ranked Iceland in first place out of 177 countries, and Sierra Leone at the bottom. Nigeria was ranked 158th, above Tanzania but below Eritrea (http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/).

Human Rights Watch in a recent report stated that millions of Nigerians are mired in poverty, while many politicians have used stolen government revenues to sponsor political violence in order to rig elections.

"Corruption has also led to the waste and theft of windfall oil revenues that could have begun to realise Nigerians' rights to health, education, and other basic human rights," stated the HRW report published on January 1. It stated, "Corruption lies at the heart of Nigeria's most pressing human rights problems".

Babagana Kingibe, secretary to Nigeria's federal government, said the administration was aware of the issue of mass poverty and is doing everything possible to address the problem. Kingibe said the Nigerian government is working to curtail poverty in the country through its development policy that will "contribute to poverty reduction".

Asian theologians warn: Fundamentalism can harm faiths

Francis Wong

Hong Kong (ENI) – Christian communities should critically examine current religious resurgence and avoid the spread of fundamentalism that can harm human rights, theologians from the Global South have said at a Lutheran World Federation seminar in Hong Kong.

"The growth of religions in India provides the country with more welfare activities. But on the other hand, the rise of fundamentalism is destructive," the Rev. Busi Suneel Bhanu of the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College in India told Ecumenical News International (ENI).

"Fundamentalism in religions does harm to human rights, and the caste system is an example. We need to understand and make use of the positive sides of the religious resurgence and make a contribution to the society," Bhanu said after the January 28 meeting. His comments came after an outbreak of violence between Hindus and Christians in India's Orissa state recently.

Indonesian Lutheran pastor Nainggolan Binssar said, "In view of the conflicts in the name of religion, dialogue among different faiths is needed." In comments to ENI, he added, "But I need to emphasise that violence does not come from religions, but from the personal interests of [unfaithful] religious people." Binssar, a theology professor, said the seminar helped equip him to develop peace programs for his students.

The seminar was organized by the Geneva-based LWF's department of theology and studies. It drew more than 20 academics mainly Lutherans from Asian and African countries. It considered how the resurgence of Christian and other faiths are affecting churches, and how churches can engage more with social, economic and political realities.

The Rev. Karen Bloomquist, the LWF's director of theology and studies, said the meeting was intended to provide a platform for Global South theologians to critically examine the theological traditions that the North have passed to the South.

"We need to set our methodologies of doing theology in our own context," said Sarah Yeun Wai Man of the Institute for Mission and Intercultural Studies, the Lutheran theological Seminary in Hong Kong, which co-organized the meeting.

Yuen noted that a growing interest in religion and spirituality has existed for some time in Asia and that theologians need to exchange their local responses to this globalised phenomenon.

Churches welcome European convention on human trafficking

Brussels (ENI) – Church groups in Europe have welcomed the entry into force of a pan-European convention against human trafficking, and described it as a major step in ensuring the protection of the human rights of trafficked persons in Europe.

"It is encouraging that an essential human rights instrument such as this Council of Europe convention can finally enter into force," said Torsten Moritz of the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe on February 1.

The Strasbourg-based Council of Europe, which groups 47 European countries, drew up the convention that is intended to reinforce the prevention of trafficking by strengthening the prosecution of traffickers, and protecting the human rights and human dignity of the victims.

The CCME said that together with the Conference of European Churches and Caritas Europe, a Roman Catholic group, it had played a key role in getting enough member states of the Council of Europe to ratify the convention in order to allow it to come into force.

The commission for migrants urged the European Union now to ratify the convention, and complained that, to date, EU anti-trafficking measures had concentrated on crime control rather than on helping victims of trafficking.

The Council of Europe said 14 countries have already ratified the convention and called on other member states to do likewise.

"Every year, more than 600,000 people are sold in Europe," said Terry Davis, the secretary general of the Council of Europe. "They are the victims of international criminals. More than 80 percent of them are girls and women, and 70 percent of them are forced into sexual servitude."

Other victims are traded for the purposes of forced labour, illegal adoptions and organ transplants, Davis said in a statement to mark the coming into force of the convention on February 1.

Among other things, the anti-trafficking convention is intended to prohibit the punishment of victims of trafficking, and requires governments of countries to which people are trafficked to take measures to discourage demand.

The Council of Europe says that this would mean that the relevant authorities should prosecute people who know that they are paying for sex with a victim of human trafficking regardless of the legal status of prostitution in any given country.

Malaysian opposition leader says government misusing Islam

Michele Green

Singapore (ENI) – Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim has said multi-racial harmony in his country is under threat by State-sponsored Islamic puritanism that has damaged the constitutional rights of other faiths in the Muslim-majority southeast Asian nation.

In a speech at a regional forum in Singapore, Anwar also suggested that the Malaysian government was using Islamic puritanism to win votes in a general election expected to be held later during 2008.

"The real issue is what I would describe as State-sponsored Muslim puritanism borne more by racist sentiments than religious principles," Anwar told a gathering at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore. "It is this kind of theology that leads to the rejection of constitutional freedom of other faiths."

About 60 percent of Malaysia's population of 25 million are Muslims. Christians and Buddhists, who are mostly from the country's minority Chinese community, make up about 25 percent of the population, and Hindus of Indian origin make up about 10 percent.

Racial harmony between Malaysia's ethnic and religious groups has recently begun to show some strains as minorities have complained of their rights being encroached upon by court decisions and government policies favouring Muslims. Earlier in January, Malaysia's government banned minorities from using the word "Allah" in publications to describe the God of their non-Muslim faiths. Anwar called the ban "ridiculous nonsense".

"Today, this sense of inclusiveness is under serious threat," he said. "I'm convinced that Muslims, many Malaysian Muslims too, are equally appalled by this display of narrow-mindedness and intolerance."

Anwar is a former government minister who was groomed to lead Malaysia, but was fired in 1998 by then-Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad over allegations of corruption and sodomy. Anwar denied any wrongdoing and said the charges against him were trumped up by Mahathir who had begun to see him as a political threat. He was acquitted of the sodomy charge in 2004 by Malaysia's highest court.

A ban against Anwar holding public office or running in general elections because of the conviction for corruption will expire in April.

Lessons

Lessons can be learned from illness

Lisa M. Petsche

As a medical social worker, I've been privileged to journey with sick people and learn from them the lessons serious illness can teach those who are receptive. I would like to share some of these insights here.

A health crisis, whether our own or a loved one's, can be a jarring reminder of life's fragility. For some people it serves as a wakeup call, prompting them to re-examine their values and priorities. Perhaps they've been working too much, at the expense of time with family. Or maybe they've neglected their health. In such cases, altering priorities and habits may improve their quality of life.

Sometimes illness leads people to discover a new sense of purpose, such as becoming a peer counsellor or fundraising for a cure for the disease they're living with.

One of the realities that surprises many people in crisis is that they are stronger than they knew. While they may not consider themselves particularly courageous, resourceful or resilient, through God's grace (whether they recognize it as such or not) they rise to the occasion and do whatever is required. I learned that first-hand when my husband experienced two cardiac crises this past year.

People who face life and death issues may approach their faith with a renewed commitment, deepening their relationship with their Heavenly Father, which helps to sustain them.

Illness also reminds people how important it is to have a supportive social network. This is a time when they find out who really cares. Sometimes the truth is disappointing, but more often than not ill people are overwhelmed by the kindness of others. Typically, relationships are strengthened as loved ones rally around the sick person.

Serious illness is humbling because it necessitates reliance on other people – professional caregivers as well as family and friends. For fiercely independent types and those who favour caregiving roles, it can be particularly difficult to accept help. They must learn to graciously allow people who care the opportunity to demonstrate this in tangible ways, just as they would want to do if the roles were reversed.

When a health crisis throws a wrench into people's carefully planned lives, they realize they are not in control after all – another humbling lesson. God is ultimately in charge, which is good news, of course, because, no problem anyone may encounter is too big for God to handle when they turn it over to him in prayer. When a person's health is threatened and their future is uncertain, the irritations of everyday life – such as household clutter, squabbling kids, telephone solicitations and traffic jams – suddenly pale in comparison. As a result, they stop sweating the small stuff.

Those who are ill also tend to be more open to recognizing God's blessings. They don't take much for granted. They learn to live in the present and appreciate the simpler things in life that make it enjoyable, such as music, a good cup of tea, the sights and sounds of nature and the company of family and friends.

The sobering truth that today is all we really have prompts many ill people and oftentimes also their loved ones to contemplate the big questions, such as, What is the meaning of life and What is my purpose? Popular culture would have us believe we are valued primarily for external characteristics – our looks, our possessions and our measurable accomplishments – rather than for who we are as spiritual beings. We know it's what's inside that counts, but it's easy to lose sight of this truth.

Serious illness, which has a way of stripping life to the core, serves as a reminder. What's important, when all is said and done, is the extent to which our lives bear witness to God's love and his presence in the world. May God bless in a special way those among us who are living with illness, and may the rest of us do whatever we can to help ease their burden.

Lisa M. Petsche is a mother of three and a freelance journalist specializing in family life.

Miss Budge fights back

Daphne Simpkins

Mildred Budge had only seen one angel that she recognized. It had happened long after her mother's funeral, where she had not been able to cry. Then, later in a sandwich shop where Mildred had never gone to eat with her mother (those were the only places she could bear to go for lunch now), Mildred had sat across from a bedraggled, heavyset woman with monkish brown hair. The stranger had smiled at Mildred Budge angelically through gold-brown eyes.

Mildred had been transfixed. Felt her heart burn in recognition, as pierced by a powerfully delivered though silent message of love. After delicately wiping the chicken salad from the corners of her mouth, Miss Budge had folded her white paper napkin, placed it on the metal tabletop, and walked out of the sandwich shop with the light from the angel's eyes warming her heart, piercing and penetrating the wall of grief that had imprisoned Mildred for months.

The wall came tumbling down outside in her red and black mini-Cooper where Miss Budge finally cried for her mother's leave-taking. After the cry, Mildred could eat at the places where she and her mother had lunched together through the years.

Mildred did not tell others of the wordless encounter with the angel whose message had been a reminder of an eternal love greater than the loss of a mortal one, or insist inside herself that she had seen an angel: Mildred was as ready to say that a human stranger had delivered the kind of message that was sometimes entrusted to angels – even ones who really needed a make-over.

That flexibility of mind and spirit was not the same response she had for the other type of supernatural creature Mildred Budge also encountered far more often. Mildred had many times seen women who looked like church ladies and were not. They were imposters. They were taunters of God dressed like church ladies, masquerading as people of light but whose spirits were possessed by darkness. They emanated natures that the Bible described as demon-possessed, only no one ever called them that. It felt impolite.

Mildred Budge saw such creatures and knew who they were instantly. Furthermore, they knew her. There was an instant clash. While not much changed in her outward appearance, the inner gladiator in Miss Budge went on full alert whenever an emissary of the enemy threw the first punch. She always fought with the sword of truth – it was her job – once the skirmish had begun. Though unpleasant and sometimes awkward, these encounters were always only skirmishes.

The most recent occurrence happened at a book club meeting that had begun as a garden club years ago and evolved into a reading club due to the fact that the members had aged and no longer worked in gardens but now read books. A newcomer church lady look-alike had stood up right after the anthem was sung, and waved a magazine article about a book she was proposing that they all read. She called out loudly, "This book says what I believe. I don't need God, and I don't want God. If you would just let yourselves think about it, you wouldn't either. That song is stupid."

Miss Budge was still seated at the piano where she had played the club's anthem, "Nearer My God to Thee." The music choice did not reflect the club's stated mission or theology specifically. Rather, it was a song that they all knew – a given truth in most of their lives: the words felt like home on their lips – and which Miss Budge knew how to play. She didn't know how to play many songs other than hymns. The club's anthem had triggered this outburst from the God-hater who after making her statement had cast a triumphant glance at Mildred whose hands began to tremble because she didn't like to fight, but she would anyway.

Mildred rose from the piano bench already dressed in the armour described in Ephesians. The bench legs scraped indecorously on the freshly waxed hardwood floor. Mildred marched over to the podium. She had not straightened her skirt upon rising. It was twisted with the seams askew. Her sturdy beige slip was showing. Her gaze appeared swimmy behind her thick-lensed glasses, but her words were true, and when she spoke, people listened.

"God is real. Jesus is real. The Bible is true, and angels exist," Mildred said. "I can't prove that angels exist, but I shall tell you that I believe I saw one once."

And then Mildred told the very private story of her mother's death and how she had lost the ability to feel anything for a while – not even near to God – her home. "As a believer in Jesus Christ I knew I would see my mother again one day, for she taught me to love Jesus. But I couldn't feel the assurance of that until that experience when the angel delivered the message of God's unfailing love." The retired school teacher calmly looked around the room, her eyes becoming bright and golden and God-affirming with the message of faith. "I want to draw nearer to God every day through Jesus my Lord. It is the hymn of my life," Miss Budge added simply, and then headed toward her regular chair.

She click-clacked in her gray Easy Spirit pumps across the hardwood floor to her regular chair. Awkward though respectful silence gave her time to get seated. For when anyone testifies, there is a certain period of adjustment as souls being sanctified recall that the truth pierces and refreshes, and souls not being sanctified by the affirmed belief that Jesus redeems sinners feel pricked by unrecognized goads.

Miss Budge felt her own set of emotions. She was freshly gladdened to be able to feel again, for she had been numb with that unforgettable grief for a while and was in the moment yet still humbly grateful for even trembling and remembered pain. A hand of a friend reached over and patted her shoulder. That friend whispered, "I miss your mother, too."

Miss Budge nodded her gratitude and glanced over at the visitor whose eyes had not changed. They were still daring, lying: the lie boasted, 'I'll win! Eventually.'

Miss Budge did not smile back. She offered no lie of politeness. Instead, she met the gaze of the darkness with the light in her eyes, and shook her head decisively, no.

Flowers & Thistles

Curt Gesch

Suicide birds: Slaughter on the highways – part III

(Parts I and II appeared in Christian Courier *in 2006)*

"Do you see many birds?" I asked my friend, Wayne, a logging truck driver.

"A few ptarmigan, including the ones without any black on them at all. And, of course, the suicide birds," Wayne replied.

I knew immediately what he meant: flocks of common redpolls had been fluttering to the road and then moving on, ahead of the truck, all along our route. They seemed to prefer sitting in the middle of the road to any perch in the thousand-square-mile forest we were passing through.

Redpolls, pine siskins, pine and evening grosbeaks, and sometimes crossbills (red or white-winged) are the most common "suicide birds." They form small or large flocks during fall and winter and consider our highways prime habitat during the worst of the year.

They are after grit. Birds being toothless, they swallow food, temporarily store it in a crop and grind it up in a muscular gizzard. Hence the need for gravel, sand, stones. Grit. (For those who have worked in the mining industry, the rock crushers use steel balls as grit to grind the ore in great, big tumblers that are the gizzards of the operation.)

They also like the salt that we spread on the highways for safety. Salt? How much salt can a bird need? I'm not sure about birds, but I know that salt is essential to human health. Human beings in sophisticated, wealthy kingdoms like those of ancient Ghana knew how important salt was: they traded gold for salt. (They had no Windsor nearby apparently.)

Pine siskins also nibble on plaster, "ashes, freshly set Portland cement, chimney mortal, and a blue clay spoil pile from a cellar hole," according to the authoritative *The Birds of British Columbia (IV)*.

That same bird book mentions 1,000 siskins killed on highways along Highway 1 in Glacier National park in one winter, and 120 killed along a 30 metre stretch of road near Enderby.

Suicide: not really. Intentional slaughter: no. But slaughter it remains.

Once I rode in the front seat of a bus between Terrace and Smithers, B.C. I heard some thumping and saw a bird or two bounce off the windshield. This particular bus driver was not taciturn and told me how he hated killing the birds. He said, "Sometimes the grill is covered with feathers by the time I get to Smithers."

When I drive the same section in winter by car I try to scare away the birds by honking the car horn (I suppose the bus driver wouldn't make too many passengers happy if he honked that many times.) The birds usually fly away, make a "loop" and settle down on the road again behind me.

Not that there is waste. Highway-killed birds are not usually "wasted." I've watched coyotes sitting on the road shoulder waiting for traffic to pass, then darting out and grabbing dead and dying birds. Ravens consider highways to be snack bars. They sit on a snag and clunk down on the road after each bird strike, pick up a small bird and strain to swallow it whole. A big gulp and wait then a wait for the next meal.

*****

If you live near a freeway, the number of dead birds may not be as immediately apparent. With thousands of cars on a freeway, you may not find big flocks of siskins. But in the Golden Triangle, you may see flocks of horned larks, or snow buntings along the shoulder in winter.

Wherever there are pheasants, you'll find them squashed from time to time, either from trying to run across a busy road or flying low and not dodging in time.

Freeway rights-of-way are superb wildlife habitat. Where they are not mowed, they provide grassy, shrubby, or forested habitat. But birds cross roáds. They fly across roads. Mother pheasants try to lead their young across the 401. Young birds making their first flights land on roads. Swallows swoop after insects and encounter Toyotas, Chevys and Macks.

Intentional slaughter? No. But slaughter it remains. The best-intentioned efforts to help wildlife often cause death.

Swerving to avoid a killdeer and causing human death is not an option. People are more important at some point. But death by highway is much more common than we think. Our convenience, our human necessity for transportation, has a cost.

And I have no answer to the dilemma. Drive slower? Overpasses for birds? (That's called air.) Training and educating people probably won't work in high-volume traffic areas. Training and educating birds doesn't seem possible. There is always survival of the fittest, I suppose.

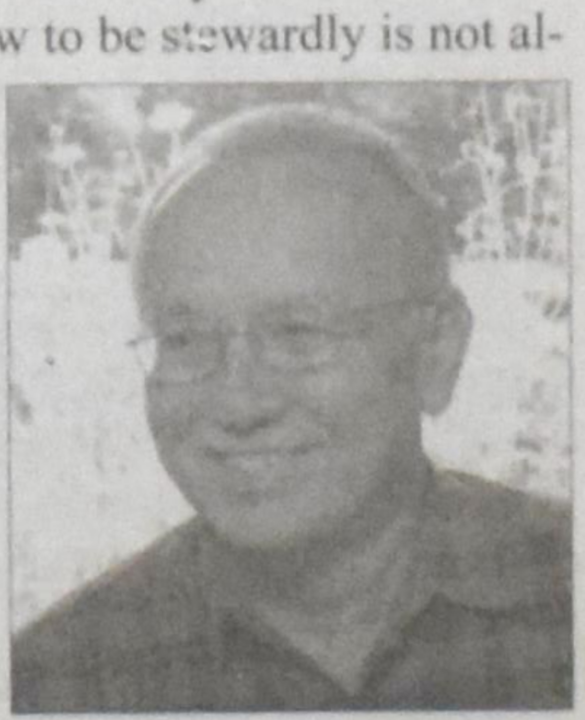
As a sometimes grouse hunter, I wish to testify that I saw more grouse flattened on our light-volume, backwoods roads during the past two years that I've shot.

Outside of making scavengers happy, I don't know what to say about the slaughter on our highways. I only know that the siskins and redpolls, grosbeaks and crossbills, pheasants and grouse, are not really suicidal.

They are in our care, but how to be stewardly is not always evident to even the most concerned motorist, driving to church on Sunday morning.

Redpoll

Pine Grosbeak



Curt Gesch is a neo-Luddite, neo-Calvinist, and – as far as he can tell – a neonatal human being. His telephone number is (250) 846-9511.

Fundamentalism

The fundamentalists – who and what are they?

Abraham Kuyper

Bert den Boggende

In the December 2007 issue of the CRC's *The Banner* Dordt College professor James Schaap is quoted as saying that "fundamentalism and materialism [are] the CRC's greatest threats"(p. 19). Unfortunately, the article does not elaborate what Schaap meant by fundamentalism. The term is widely bandied about, not only for Protestantism, for which the term was coined, but also for certain segments of Islam. The *Banner*'s journalist as well as Schaap may have assumed that we knew the meaning of the term. I also have used the term at times carelessly. But do we and do we do justice to the origin of Fundamentalism?

Fundamentalism must be understood against the background of various 19th-century developments, including revivals, theological liberalism, Darwinian evolutionary science, and sects. Many orthodox people on this continent became concerned about the theological welfare of the church. In 1909 two laymen made a large sum of money available to publish pamphlets defending orthodoxy. These *Fundamentals* were initially sent free to those engaged in Christian work throughout the English-speaking work In 1917 the Los Angeles Bible Institute published ninety articles (a few original ones were deleted) in four volumes totalling about 1470 pages (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, reprint 1993).

With one exception all the authors were men and most of them were American, although there were a significant number of British and Canadian authors as well. While most of their names are now forgotten, except by church historians, they were prominent figures in their own time. Among this intellectual elite were Anglican canons and bishops, Presbyterian professors, including a principal of Toronto's Knox College, lawyers, Egyptologists, doctors in divinity, and members of the British nobility. While American fundamentalism is often associated with the South, few authors came from south of the Mason-Dixon line.

With the Scopes trial in 1926 fundamentalism acquired a negative connotation, but the movement was originally intended, as the American historian Sydney Mead astutely observed in 1954, "to recall the denominations to theological and confessional self-consciousness."

This positive side seems to have disappeared. Let me take a closer look at the four points mentioned above in order to show the positive as well as the negative background and developments.

Revivalism

Historians have argued and probably will continue to argue how effective revivals actually were. I will ignore those arguments here and concentrate on a few pertinent characteristics. Like the Romantics, 19th century revivals often catered to the emotions, reacting against the cold intellectualism that had crept into the churches. It was also a pious reaction against the churches' formalism. In the Netherlands a somewhat similar movement led to the 1834 *Afscheiding* and later on to the founding of the CRC.

The revivals' positive side was countered by a simple preaching that often bordered on the simplistic. The intent was saving souls and no attention was given to the problems accompanying a developing industrial society. The result was a strengthening of individualism and anti-intellectualism. Theologically it meant a move towards Arminianism and away from doctrines and creeds. Faith became a private affair, separated from affairs of state, economics, and society as a whole. The peculiar tenets of a particular denomination were implicitly deemed irrelevant to the public square.

The Fundamentals were intended to call people back to a more soundly based understanding of Scripture and a more scripturally-based understanding of and attitude to society. In some ways this movement was not all that different from Abraham Kuyper's writings and claims in the Netherlands.

As a professor and author Schaap can hardly be accused of being an anti-intellectual, so it seems unlikely that he had this positive aspect of *The Fundamentals* in mind. Rather, it seems likely that he objected to the individualistic and anti-intellectual aspects of the revivalistic-pietistic approach against which the early 20th-century authors also objected. If so, Reformed Christians have significant points in common with *The Fundamentals*.

Theological liberalism

The 19th century accelerated the development of biblical criticism that had begun in the 17th century. Two aspects need to be looked at separately, although they are intimately intertwined. In the 18th century belief in miracles came to be questioned and with it many aspects of Scripture. More and more Jesus as personal saviour was replaced by an ethical Jesus, a good man showing the right approach to morals. That approach undermined the creeds of the early church as well as those of the Reformation. The revivals and pietism were a reaction against this drifting away from Scriptural moorings and so were *The Fundamentals*.

The latter included several articles defending Scriptural inspiration, the deity of Christ, his virgin birth, his bodily resurrection, the trinity, the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit, the biblical conception of sin, the propitiatory atonement, salvation by grace, justification by faith, regeneration, and future retribution. The list could be enlarged, but the total picture should be quite clear: *The Fundamentals* defended orthodoxy as formulated during the Reformation. While some articles are more irenic than others and some details may be questioned, most CRC members probably would have no problems accepting the theological arguments and perspectives. I can imagine that many would quite enjoy reading several of these theological articles and a good many are easier to read than some recent synod reports. Again, it seems unlikely that Schaap warned the CRC against its own basis and against the heart of Scripture.

The second aspect concerns the so-called higher criticism. Volume I starts with its history, addressing mostly Old Testament criticism. The New Testament is only addressed in connection with its witness and statements about the Old Testament. In the second half of the 19th century notably German theologians began to question the Mosaic authorship of the Torah. My German Bible still calls Genesis 1 Moses, Exodus 2 Moses, etc. Perhaps it is therefore no surprise that Germans began the attack.

Julius Wellhausen, often regarded as the father of modern OT higher criticism, suggested that not Moses but some editors had put the Torah together. Moses certainly could not have written about his own death as described in Deut. 34. Today the main editors are usually indicated with JEPD, the Yahwist (Jehovah), Elohist, Priestly, and Deuteronomist editors. Later scholars have added numerous sub-editors. In my MCS thesis on Exodus 32, the story of the golden calf, I encountered something of that modern scholarship of sub-editors, and while I have no quarrels with editors as such, the notion of so many sub-editors seemed to me leading to absurdity. I also realized that Wellhausen based some of his arguments on very poor research. At any rate, by the time *The Fundamentals* appeared, modern OT higher criticism had concluded that Moses was not the author of the Torah and that much was written during and after Israel's Babylonian exile.

The authors of *The Fundamentals* strongly defended the Mosaic authorship as well as the unity of Isaiah. That could be regarded as a defence of orthodoxy and the creeds. For instance, the *Belgic Confession* in article 4, dealing with the canonical books, states, "In the church of God the list is as follows: in the Old Testament, the five books of Moses – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy…." (Incidentally, can CRC ministers who have to subscribe to the creeds and disagree with the Mosaic authorship sign in good conscience or do they give a nice theological twist to it?) The issue was not so much editorial influence, which really has no bearing on faith but only on scholarship, but the trustworthiness of Scripture through the words of Christ.

In the process of defending the Mosaic authorship some authors of *The Fundamentals* raised some important points that deserved attention and which even today are often glossed over by adherents of the JEPD theory. Significantly, at least one author, dealing with recent archaeological findings, was quite modern in outlook. His article makes it abundantly clear that not all authors took the same approach. Indeed, within the ninety articles there are some interesting differences. Perhaps one could say that the range goes from old-fashioned to moderate orthodoxy. Stated differently, not all fundamentalists believed, and believe, exactly the same.

Reformed theologians too have often warned against the literalism of some forms of fundamentalism. But at the same time they have also cautioned against a wholesale, simplistic rejection of all forms of biblical literary criticism.

Darwinian evolutionary science

One of the articles is called "The Decadence of Darwinism," a good indication of the general view of Darwinism of the various authors. The authors, who significantly were not scientists but theologians, pointed out some of the flaws in Darwin's theory and concluded that his theory would soon pass. They were too optimistic, and yet to some extent they have been right, for Darwin's views have been drastically changed since he posited his theory in 1859 in *The Origins of Species*. While several authors posited that the earth was about 6000 years old, thus adhering to 17th-century archbishop Ussher's flawed calculation, not all did so, although none accepted a very old earth. They all ignored the research of William Dawson, the Canadian orthodox Presbyterian scientist and principal of Montreal's McGill University, who rejected Darwin's evolutionary theory but not geological evolution. That the authors concentrated on Darwin and not on geology is a good indication that they were essentially concerned about Darwin's theological implication.

Scottish Presbyterian theologian James Orr argued rather irenically there could be no conflict between faith and science. His mild mannered approach could have done good service at the Scopes trial at which the defence ridiculed the negative fundamentalist approach. That trial marked the beginning of fundamentalism as an anti-evolution movement. It also marked fundamentalism as negative to much of society. It influenced in the 1920s CRC synod decisions about movies, dancing, playing cards etc.

Sects

The 19th century saw an upsurge of sectarianism, drawing many away from evangelicalism. Volume 4 contains a section called "isms," that show the basic flaws and unchristian perspectives of these new, and fairly popular, sects. The first article is called "Millennial Dawn: A Counterfeit of Christianity." The title derives from Charles T.

Continued on next page

Reformed Christians and the Dutch immigration

Harry Cook

Over the past couple of years the remarkable book of Agnes Amelink, *Gereformeerden Overzee,* has been read with interest by many Dutch immigrants in Canada. The book has reminded those immigrants of what their experiences were like as they left The Netherlands and began their lives in Canada. However, the book has also raised some eyebrows. In what follows, I describe some of my reactions to the book. These remarks are an English version of an article I published in a Dutch Christian periodical. They describe both the surprise of recognition I experienced when I read the book, and a reservation I have about it.

A huge wave of people emigrated from The Netherlands to Canada and the United States in the late '40s and early '50s. Who were these people that left, and why did they leave? Why were there so many Gereformeerden among them? What was the journey like? How did these immigrants to Canada and the U.S. adjust to their new life? And how are the emigrants – and their children – doing now? How do they differ from their compatriots left behind? These are the questions that Agnes Amelink attempts to answer in her book, *Gereformeerden Overzee*. And, for the most part, she answers them with a great deal of insight and perceptiveness.

Amelink's book was of great interest to me because my family and I immigrated to Vancouver, Canada, in early 1950, so the history she describes is to a great degree my own. And numerous people in the book are acquaintances, even a relative or two. Of course, emigration and immigration bring with them intensely personal experiences and reactions, so it is a small miracle that Amelink can speak for so many of us. After 57 years in Canada, this country is now my own, but I have kept in touch with Dutch culture and would like to share a few of my reactions to Amelink's book.

Many emigrants were agricultural workers and small retailers; the latter category certainly includes my father and some of my other relatives who came to Canada. Reasons given for leaving, namely the aftermath of the war, disaffection with bureaucracy, seeking a better future, joining family and friends already in Canada or the US, and a sense of adventure, also ring true for my parents. And, yes, my father, like others, did not fail to put a spiritual spin on the move.

The book mentions the special ties between Canada and The Netherlands. I remember a ceremony on De Savornin Lohmanplein in Den Haag, where Prins Bernard inspected the Canadian troops on May 21, 1945. That parade was a few days after my youngest brother, Cornelis Wilhelmus (!), was born. Only five or six years after that date I would meet ex-soldiers in Canada, living in my neighbourhood, who had been there among those troops. I still feel grateful to them, most of them now in their eighties, a disappearing generation. And I was touched when I saw some of these old men on television, visiting The Netherlands in 2005, hailed as heroes sixty years after the liberation. We Canadians are proud of them too.

The trip to Canada was, of course, the voyage of a lifetime, certainly at that time. Our family was privileged to travel with a Canadian Pacific ship, unlike all those who traveled on immigrant boats. Since I did not get seasick like my brother, Hugh (p. 32), I enjoyed the food and my halting conversations with the crew. One cannot imagine a longer train trip than the one from Halifax to Vancouver! The train was pulled through the mountains by a huge steam locomotive! Soot filled the passenger compartments, especially in the summertime when the windows had to be open. An acquaintance of mine tried to clean her face a bit with her handkerchief, creating pale, white areas around her eyes; the rest of her face was black so that upon arrival she looked like a raccoon.

The flood of newcomers was welcomed by fieldmen who found homes and work for immigrants who had not been sponsored by Canadian farmers. Amelink describes the hardships well: people living in chicken houses or barns, endless mud roads, families working long, hot days in the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta, and, worst of all, people having to work on Sundays.

While my family was not exposed to hardships, I do remember the small trials: where does one find yellow, not orange, cheese, and potatoes with yellow, not white, flesh! But we also treasured the abundance of food available in all grocery stores. The author describes more significant trials also. Women, often alone at home, had a particularly difficult time with homesickness (ch. 6). And then there were the decisions to be made about which name to use in the new country. The announcement of my brother's wedding in church was marred by an embarrassing mispronouncement and contributed to the decision to change his name (ch. 10). Amelink also describes the improvements many immigrants fought hard for: an old car and a down payment for a house were the most pressing for almost every family. When these goals were achieved, families in Canada often forgot that their relatives at home had similar increases in prosperity. Opportunities in other areas also came along: I am not sure that some of my siblings and I would have studied at the university level had we stayed in The Netherlands.

At the center of all was, always, the local church. Immigrants looked to their newly formed churches for religious and social support. The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Canada grew, from a few pre-war congregations to more than 200 congregations today. Amelink has a personal tie to the origin of the Gereformeerde Kerk (Vrijgemaakt) in Canada, here represented by the Canadian Reformed Church, and she tells about the exploits of the inimitable Rev. Pieffers in that church in Southern Alberta (ch. 11). I remember the sadness of my parents when some members of their local CRC felt called to join a newly organizing Canadian Reformed Church.

One cannot imagine a longer train trip than the one from Halifax to Vancouver! The train was pulled through the mountains by a huge steam locomotive! Soot filled the passenger compartments, especially in the summertime when the windows had to be open.

Christian schools were an important and draining expense, as Amelink mentions (ch. 8). A Christian school teacher in The Netherlands already told my parents that there was a Christian school in Vancouver, the place we were to move to. And sure enough, a few weeks after our arrival, two middle-aged bachelors arrived at our home to ask my parents to send their children to the Vancouver Christian School, a request to which they agreed; with our arrival the enrolment of that school went from 18 to 22

See **Dutch immigration** *on page 19*

The fundamentalists *continued*

Russell's 1886 book that became the basis for the Jehovah's Witnesses, although the title of the book was later changed. The author detailed ten unorthodox propositions.

The article on Mormonism is a devastating critique of its founders and is still a worthwhile reading. Howevere, the author on Christian Science never referred to it by that name in the title, calling it Eddyism. As far as the author was concerned, this cult had nothing to do with Christianity, proving his point by dismantling Mrs. Eddy's (Ellen White's) four basic propositions. The final article deals with modern spiritualism, which started in Hydesville, Wayne County, NY, in 1848. If the author's numbers are accurate, there were 16,000,000 adherents in the USA alone and worldwide about four times that number. Whatever the numbers' accuracy, it is clear that the movement attracted many.

The attraction of these various cults and sects may have been that people find it hard to live up to the gospel's demands and try to find an easier and more comfortable way of living. The authors call people away from these movements with biblical evidence and often strong wording. In that respect two articles about the Catholic Church, which were placed in a group dealing with the true church, could have been included in this section. As their titles indicate, "Is Romanism Christianity?" and "Rome, the Antagonist of the Nation," Catholicism was strongly condemned, as was not unusual at that time.

Nowadays few of us would agree with the scathing attack on the Catholic Church, and I don't think we should, but the arguments against the cults and sects are solid enough to deserve our approval.

These four points certainly have not exhausted all articles. *The Fundamentals* also contain articles, about prayer, evangelism and mission, and philosophy. Two of the latter deserve further mention. A New York attorney argued that modern philosophy is absolutely useless and contrary to the Word of God. The other, by a theologian with a law degree, accepted that there was a place for philosophy. The contrasting articles again indicate that *The Fundamentals* are not uniform, that there are diverging opinions.

That point, I think, is important. All too often fundamentalism is treated as monolithic. It was not so in the early part of the 20th century, and it does not seem to be the case in the early part of the 21st century.

If that is indeed so, against what did Schaap warn the CRC precisely? As I have attempted to show, there are many aspects in the early movement that deserve attention and often support. A blanket condemnation does not do justice – and Christians are in the business of doing justice.

Corinthians

The content of our preaching and of our faith

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.
I Corinthians 15:14

A. A. van Ruler

The statement that Paul makes here is remarkable – that our faith is merely a soap bubble if Christ has not risen from the dead.

He doesn't, of course, mean that Christ's resurrection is literally the only thing we believe and that therefore our faith would be without content if Christ had not arisen.

On the contrary, we believe many more things. We also believe in the cross of Christ and in his coming in the flesh and in the inauguration of the kingdom of God in the person of Christ and in the entire doings of God with the people of Israel. We believe in all God's promises and in all his commandments. All these make a world of real things, actions, goals, and the power to do and to think.

Nevertheless, all these facets of our faith are without content if Christ has not arisen. Then the heart and backbone are missing. Then all the rest falls apart in a multiplicity of futile efforts. The resurrection from the dead is what saves in salvation. Everything God does is to win victory over death.

We must not take this too narrowly, of course. This victory over death does concern death as we first learn about death, namely, that one day our life will end. But this stands in a much broader context. In the Bible the word "death" means above all being taken away from before God's face, being unable to exist before him. So it refers to all forms of corruption and futility, the meaninglessness and emptiness to which creation is now subject. The corruption that has befallen God's good and beautiful creation comes in many forms: hunger, violence, sickness, suffering, sorrow and despair. All these reverberate in Paul's words about death and God's victory over death.

Here we strike the trail of an important relationship. I mean the very close relationship between the Easter proclamation and our knowledge of God. Easter isn't just about Jesus Christ and the fact that he arose from the dead. Easter is much more about God and the fact that he raised Jesus Christ from the dead. This warrants our close attention. Paul is not just talking about resurrection, for immediately afterward and in between he reaches for the words "been raised". The resurrection is a deed, a work of God. That's why in verse 15 Paul says that if Christ had not arisen, he'd be a false witness about God.

Indeed, the whole matter of the resurrection hinges not in the first place on the historic fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ but more powerfully in our knowledge of God – as it was first given to Israel in the Old Testament.

It is about the big question: who and what is God. Is he just the affirmation or repudiation of reality? Is he swept along in the unbroken cycle of life and death? Is God reducible to the divinity of all that is and happens? These are the primal notions of all extra-biblical pondering and reflection.

But in the Bible God is the Lord over life and death. It is he who critically carries life through death. He remains true to his creation and creatures although they are subject to corruption and nothingness. He comes to the help of the lost. He even enters into their lostness and rescues them.

This is the essence of God's doings – saving his creation and creatures from corruption. This is how God is God – in his overcoming of death to which we and the whole creation have been subject and which we are powerless to overcome. Faith is, then, surrender to and trust in this God. In his deeds he provides a firm ground where the creature falls in the bottomless pit of lostness.

The Four Evangelists by Jakob Jordaens (Dutch, 1593–1678)

So it is true that if Christ had not been raised from the dead then everything falls asunder and all the surety of God's doings crumble. In the Bible to believe is to say "Amen"– that things are firmly founded, trustworthy and true. But all this is illusion and soap bubbles if there is no arising but only falling of Jesus Christ and only Adam's fall into sin. Then it is a faith without content. Then only sin, subjection to futility, would have content. That thought is enough to make you shudder: futility as the only content!

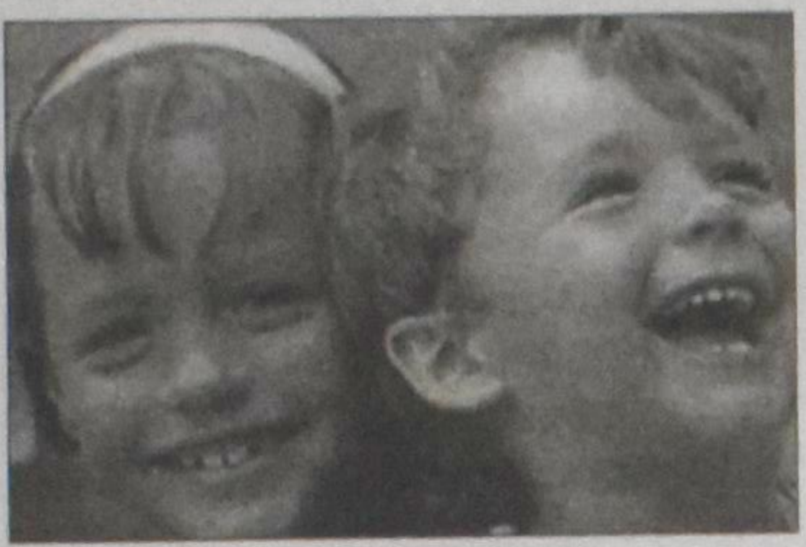
But those who know God know that this is not the way things are. True, but at the same time we must be careful with this assertion. There isn't only this immediate relationship of God and faith. In between we have the preaching of the Word. This is why Paul first says, "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless." Only then does he add, "...and so is your faith."

We do not capture the nature and doings of God directly in our faith. God must come to us clothed in proclamation. We have to be told who and what God is. Only by preaching can faith be awakened in our hearts In and of ourselves we cannot know precisely who and what God is. We cannot hold fast to it and live from it. And we cannot entirely believe it either. So we must be constantly reminded. This happens in preaching. It comes to us every Sunday and every Sunday is a mini-Easter. We are told every time again that God overcomes and defeats all forms of death and that he awakens us and raises us up so that we can keep on believing.

In Jesus Christ all God's promises are Yes and Amen. The fact that this is how God is – that we fallen creatures may without reservation surrender ourselves to him – has been established once and for all in this great act in history by which he raised his Son from the dead. This is why in the preaching of the Word we are called – literally called – daily to live in the power of Jesus' resurrection. We must not sink further and further into sin and into death, but rise up to serve God with joy and thanksgiving. This is possible for everyone. We have only to do it. God is calling us.

Make 'em laugh

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema



Children see life from a unique vantage point, often causing much amusement because of their words and antics. Over the years our five children presented my husband and me with many laugh-out-loud moments. For example, when we went camping, we often went for long walks with our kids. Once when 3-year-old Benjamin didn't want to walk any farther, he lurched dramatically from side to side and wailed, "The wind is blowing me over!"

On another occasion when I was getting 1-year-old Davita ready for bed, 8-year-old Tamara came into the bedroom carrying her toothbrush which she had just used but hadn't rinsed. Before I could stop her, she put it into Davita's mouth and said, "You can have the leftovers!"

Despite its lighthearted reputation, laughter is serious business. Like all God-given gifts, it can be used for good or for evil. The shape that laughter takes in our homes is a barometer of our families' emotional and spiritual health. How can we nurture laughter that honours God and nourishes our children? Here are some suggestions.

First, teach your children the difference between laughing at a person and laughing with a person. I vividly recall a family picnic when I was about 8 years old. Several adults teased me because I had gone searching for pop bottle caps with a boy – insinuating that he was my boyfriend when he really wasn't. Though the laughter wasn't meant to harm me, it made me embarrassed and reduced me to tears. I hid my wet face behind small, sweaty hands wishing that everyone would just leave me alone.

Tell your kids about times when people laughed at you. Did someone taunt you because you had large ears or crooked teeth? Did a classmate laugh at you because you gave an incorrect answer to a teacher's question? Did a sibling mock you because you didn't earn a spot on the basketball team roster? Explain how that negative laughter made you feel ashamed, chagrined or belittled.

Also, tell your kids about incidents in your childhood when you laughed with others. Perhaps you told a joke that your siblings appreciated, and you felt affirmed as a witty person. Or maybe you and your father laughed together as he read a funny story to you while you were curled up beside him on the couch, feeling a sense of belonging and security.

When I was 7 or 8 years old, I wrote a nonsensical ditty while sitting at the kitchen table, looking out a large window. This is what I wrote and then read to my mother: "I met a cow that was 10 feet long. He had no feet, but he was so strong. He lived in a barn that had no roof, but when it rained it was waterproof." I'm convinced that the reason I remember my rhyme over 40 years later is because it was greeted with appreciative laughter, which made me feel special. If I had been laughed at instead of with, I doubt that I would remember the poem today.

Healthy laughter – laughing with others – makes us glow and grow; unhealthy laughter – laughing at others – does the opposite. It demeans, humiliates, mocks, sneers, and jeers. It stunts the emotional well-being and spiritual health of both the person who laughs and the one who is being laughed at. Healthy laughter unites people; unhealthy laughter divides them.

In order not to embarrass our children because of comical things they have said or done, sometimes my husband and I have had to go to great lengths in order to stifle our laughter. In *Laughter, Love & Limits: Parenting For Life* Dr. Maggie Mamen says, "Children are unbelievably funny in their quest to grow up and we have to learn to keep a straight face at the time so that they can maintain their dignity" (Creative Bound, 1998, pp.25).

For example, when my son Benjamin anticipated entering Grade One, he said, "I wish they hadn't thought of school till I was a teenager!" Even though his comment was amusing, it revealed his underlying anxiety about an unknown future. So, it wouldn't have been appropriate to laugh about it.

Another time, a mom took her young son into the women's washroom to use the facilities, but he refused to go to the bathroom. Why? He thought that if he did so, he would become a girl – and he definitely didn't want that to happen! Although this was quite funny from an adult's perspective, it wasn't humourous from the child's viewpoint.

Second, although we teach our children not to laugh at others, it's important that they learn to laugh at themselves and not to take themselves too seriously. My daughter's Grade 8 teacher posted on the classroom wall this saying by an anonymous writer: "Blessed are they who can laugh at themselves, for they shall never cease to be amused." How true!

I've had many opportunities to laugh at myself. For instance, once when my husband was teasing me, I playfully tried to kick him in retaliation. But I missed! Instead of hitting him, I smacked the doorjamb. For the next two weeks I hobbled around while waiting for my severely bruised toe to heal. I laughed at myself, and my family joined in. If I had refused to laugh at my stupidity, I could have made life miserable for everyone around me.

On another occasion my 2-year-old son Benjamin, who was resting on my lap, looking up and said, "You have hairs in your nose, Mommy!" I laughed out loud! Yes, I do have hairs in my nose! By laughing at myself, I showed my son that it's all right to accept and laugh about our bodies' unattractive features.

Dr. Mamen points out the benefit of teaching children to laugh at their physical features that might prompt teasing. She relates how she learned that "openly recognizing one's own foibles could actually head off potential attack and defuse the destructive teasing." She adds, "As the tallest in my class from age 10, I knew how to respond 'grow up and find out' to the perennial question 'how's the weather up there?'... I had learned that to laugh at them [the jabs] myself, before others had a chance, was by far the best antidote" (*Creative Bound*, 1998, pp.20).

People who learn to laugh at themselves make life enjoyable for others around them because they aren't pompous, pretentious, and stuffy. For example, in *Expecting Adam*, Martha Beck writes about her son who has Down syndrome and is able to laugh at himself: "He laughs at his own bizarre pronunciation, at the inaccurate attempts others make to understand him, at his strenuous efforts to communicate with them.... His laughter is one of the most potent means by which he achieves his trademark effect: puncturing pomposity,

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Loss creates a new context

My window seat

When I was 15 I was involved in a lawn mower accident. I was a regular teenager that didn't think about safety first when I was cutting the lawn. To my defence, the lawn mower that I was using was called a Fly-mo, which had no wheels and hovered over the ground through small air jets. It was a machine that weighed very little and was very easy to manoeuvre. The grass was damp and I was cutting the side of a hill. I was wearing running shoes instead of steel toe boots. At one point I slipped on the wet grass and my foot went under the lawnmower taking off part of my large toe and some of the side of my foot.

I ended up being okay. It could have been much worse. I stayed in the hospital for two weeks while I had a number of skin graft operations, and after a year of rehabilitation, I could run and jump again with very little effort.

When I left the hospital, the doctors and nurses educated me on phantom pain. People who have lost a limb or a part of their body sometimes experience phantom pain. Phantom pain is when the part of the body that has been lost still shows its presence through pain or sensation.

In the seventeen years since the lawnmower accident I have experienced phantom pain three times. Although I prefer my life with a full, symmetrical set of feet I had to learn to live with the loss. I needed physiotherapy and retraining to find the new normal. Finding comfortable shoes remains difficult. But I can find good shoes with fairly little work. My feet are unequal so I wear orthotics to balance the imbalance. Cycling shoes are not easy to wear but those can be custom made. Putting my foot in a skate causes pain and it is the first thing on my body to get cold, but with a mom that knits glorious socks, this can be remedied.

Loss puts a sudden halt to business as usual.

Since Marisa died I experience ache in a similar way to phantom pain. I wake up every morning and remember that Marisa has died. I go through my day rearing three children without Marisa. Without her wisdom, humour or encouragement.

I prefer the way my life was before Marisa died. Who wouldn't? I wonder now if my life can be as good now as it was then. Without someone that made my life so promising, how could it be as good?

Loss reminds us of our frailty and flaws.

I feel like I live in two different worlds. One world is full of grief and sadness that goes along with losing a loved one. Cancer has reminded me that health can be sucked away from the body. Cancer has shown me that it doesn't choose the unhealthy, overeating smoker. It also chooses the young, healthy mother of three. The other world I live in is full of grace, peace and healing amongst the brokenness. In my current valley, I have never felt a stronger intimacy with Christ.

Humans fail and nature sets in. For weeks after Marisa died, our mailbox brought us many cards with well wishes and letters. Now our mailbox brings us bills to be paid. I am not complaining about human nature, I'm just commenting about it. Jesus doesn't fail. He still sends me lots of good stuff.

Loss reminds us that we need someone greater than us to create the new context.

When I had my lawnmower accident I needed help for physical rehabilitation. Now that Marisa is gone, I need someone greater than I to create a new context for living.

Loss creates a new context for life. So does gain.

Mendelt D. Hoekstra is the founder and director of the Music Therapy program at Bethesda, an organization supports adults with developmental possibilities. He lives in Vineland, ON with his three children.

Kitchen spirituality

Eating my words

Angela Bick

"Eet Smakelijk"

The last time we moved, my sister-in-law helped us unpack the kitchen. When she found a curiously flexible, long-handled tool topped with a half-circle of white plastic, she thought it had been put in the wrong box. "This goes in the washroom, right?" she asked. It was a *flessenschraper* – a bottle scraper.

Without a Dutch background, she made as good a guess as any. It does look like something you might use for cleaning toilets. Although my grandmothers don't recall having one, I've heard this curious utensil called the "best thing to come out of Holland." The *flessenschraper* was apparently invented to get every last bit of *vla* out of its cardboard milk carton. After all, regular spatulas are so wasteful.

If you have a *flessenschraper*, then chances are you have a *kaasschaaf* (cheese slicer) as well. And every cook of Dutch descent needs a *stamper* – a word which needs no translation. Take some vegetables, boil them to death, and then stamp (or stomp on) them vigorously, and that's your *stamppot* or *hutspot* or *boerenkool.*

I made Carrot-Cheddar Soup for my cousin once (the recipe in December's *Courier*). I thought it looked rather gourmet, like something you might be charged ten bucks for in a ritzy café. My cousin, however, wasn't fooled for a second. "So," he said, after taking one bite, "this is basically watered-down *hutspot,* isn't it?" I had to admit he was right.

Sometimes, when I'm cooking for my small family, I wonder about the logistics of my grandmothers' households. Both of my parents come from large Dutch families, and it amazes me to think of the amount of food involved. So, I asked a few aunts for details on how a family of eleven was fed. In honour of International Woman's Day and my Beppe's ninetieth birthday – both coming up on March 8th – here are a few of the memories that Beppe's four daughters were kind enough to share with me.

"Mem made very simple meals – usually meat, potatoes and veggies. She didn't waste time on presentation, yet the table was an important part of how the household was held together. There's no doubt in my mind that she was ingenious – able to do a lot with a little to feed nine hungry kids."

"All us kids had to help peel potatoes every day – even the boys, before doing the barn chores. Mem did all of the cooking, while we took turns avoiding the dishes. The week had its own routine, and the menu didn't vary much over the year. Split green pea soup with large chunks of sausage – *snert* – was a favourite dish on Saturdays. We had *boerenkool* at least once a week, and to this day I can't think of kale without seeing the huge plants dwarfing all the other plants in our garden."

"Much of Saturday was spent getting food ready for Sunday. Mem couldn't go to bed until the soup was made, the meat was cooked, and the potatoes – peeled and quartered – sat in a pan of cold water on the counter. After church, all four of the stove's elements would be pressed into service: to heat up the soup, to boil the potatoes, to warm up the meat, and to thaw a lopsided shape of frozen vegetable (probably green beans). The potatoes were always boiled – never baked, never mashed, never fried. For dessert, we nearly always had pudding. I've had enough pudding to last until I'm ninety myself."

"Cake was never for dessert; it was served with coffee in the morning, just as the afternoon tea came with cookies. For each birthday, Mem made two identical flat yellow cakes with sweet butter icing. We'd all share one, and the birthday kid would get to eat the second one alone – hoarding the treat for days, hoping the others were looking on with envy."

"I remember packages from Holland around Christmas-time – long underwear, tea towels, and the kind of food you'd find in an expensive Dutch deli now. The colors of the clothing were different, brighter and deeper somehow, and the cotton thicker. The chocolate, of course, was tastier than anything on this side of the ocean."

"The odd time Mem would be out on the road with Heit when we came home from school. Knowing she wouldn't be home for supper, Mem would cook *luiewievenkost* (literally "food for lazy women") early in the day and put the pan to bed to stay warm. When we ran into our empty, motherless home, we knew our supper could be found in Mem's bed. She wasn't lazy, though; she was provident. Any children, coming home to an empty house, would relish a bit of warmth from their mother's bed.

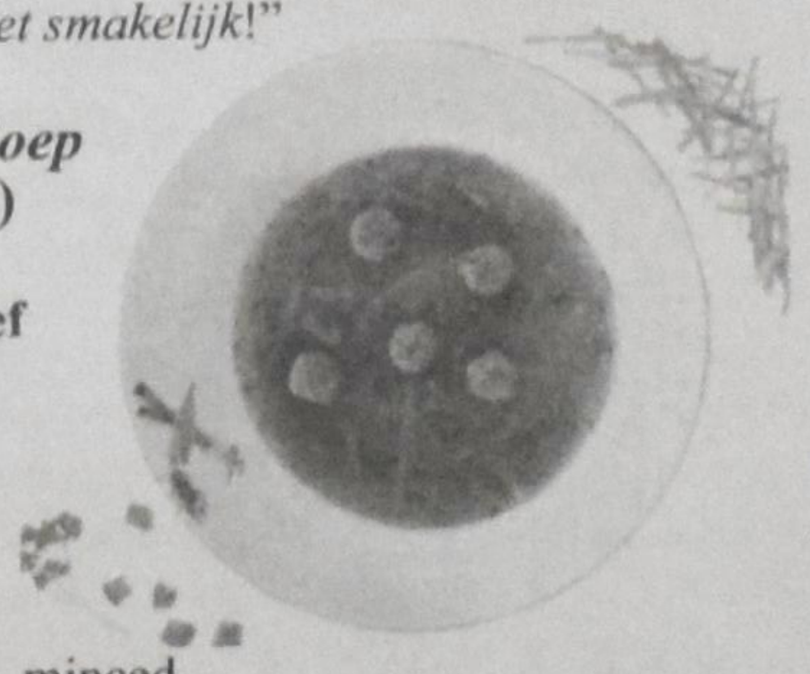
You know, I still do that myself sometimes – make the rice early. It stays piping hot, wrapped in towels and blankets in my bed until suppertime. Once we had company over after church, and they looked a bit surprised at the strange situation of food coming from upstairs."

"The first person home from church on Sunday morning got to grind the coffee beans in a little mill we had on the wall. I remember staring with fascination at the coffee in its glass percolator. Time would be suspended while the small dark drops dripped down from the basket, slowly turning the water yellowish orange, then brown, then dark brownish black. Its smell slowly spread a kind of contentment throughout the room. And the sound of the coffee perking filled the kitchen with a gentle rhythm, swelling and then fading again, like the wind."

I like to think that the kitchen may have been a kind of mission field for my Beppe. Let me explain: I once met a kind, soft-spoken woman at church who was distressed because she'd never brought anyone to the Lord. I wasn't sure how to respond. Later, however, I read a powerful, Christ-centred book of short stories by this woman's daughter. I realized that raising a child who knows Christ counts. This woman *had* brought someone to the Lord.

Beppe might have spent a lot of time in the kitchen, but it wasn't wasted time. Her nine children and thirty-four grandchildren have learned about God's faithfulness in the example of her life. An aunt gave me this recipe. I made it for our daughters in my own tiny mission field, where I serve two of Beppe's twenty-seven great-grandchildren. One of them isn't eating much yet, but to the other I said, "*Eet smakelijk*!"

Gehakt Ballen voor Soep
(Meat Balls for Soup)



2 1/2 lb ground beef
1/2 tsp celery seed
1/2 tsp cloves
1 tsp nutmeg
1 tsp parsley
1 tsp pepper
1 good-sized onion, minced
3 eggs
6 rusks or **bread crumbs**
salt to taste

Mix and make meatballs. Add to soup, bake or fry.

You can add any of the following: basil, curry, paprika, marjoram, savory, thyme.

Angela Reitsma Bick lives in Barrie, Ontario. Send your interesting stories or recipes to: al_angbick@hotmail.com.

Laugh ...continued from p. 15

posturing, self-importance, and especially intellectual pretension, wherever they occur" (Berkley Books, 1999, pp. 316).

On the other hand, people who can't laugh at themselves can be unpleasant companions, and often look ridiculous as they strive to maintain their dignity. Remember "The Emperor's New Clothes"? The emperor, puffed up with arrogance and self-importance, was incapable of laughing at himself and the stupid mistake he had made even when he realized that the child was right and that he wasn't wearing anything at all. And because of that, the crowd along the parade route laughed at him.

Third, encourage a life-enriching sense of humour in your children. Laugh at their jokes and the funny stories they tell you even if you don't understand what amused them. Each child's sense of humour develops at its own pace and in its own style and needs to be nurtured.

On one of my autumn treks to a farm with my children, they especially enjoyed the field which was strewn with pumpkins – a brilliant orange sight on a sunny day. As I purchased my produce, the farmer told me that several times a day his 3-year-old daughter rode her tricycle down the lane to see the pumpkins. To his amazement, she always laughed when she looked at them. He was never sure why. Did the bumpy knots on some of the pumpkins remind her of people's noses? Did the pumpkins look like disembodied heads? Was it just the sheer number of orange balls spread across the field? It didn't really matter. What mattered was that he laughed with her and showed her that he appreciated her sense of humour.

Each family has a treasure chest of funny incidents. Encourage your child to remember them. I only need to mention springtime and my daughter Davita's rabbit, Cookie, and everyone in my family knows what's coming next. We laugh as we recall the time I glanced out of my office window and spotted a beautiful, brown bunny leaping and cavorting on my yard. Suddenly he looked too familiar! Cookie! His lust for spring – and a female rabbit – had heightened his strength, and he had escaped from his cage. Grabbing a small cage in order to trap him, I flew outside like a wild woman, leaping and cavorting all over the yard in imitation of my prey. When Cookie found refuge under the car, I spoke gentle words to him, trying to lure him out and praying that the neighbors weren't questioning my sanity. I finally caught the renegade and – after fixing his large cage – put him back inside.

The author of Ecclesiastes says there is a time for everything, including a time to laugh (3:4). Nurture laughter in your family so that those times are plentiful and pleasing to God.

Rural depopulation and the Church

Rachel Boehm Van Harmelen

Rural Canada is changing. While some areas – especially those adjacent to larger urban centres – have experienced significant growth in recent decades, other more isolated regions are facing serious decline. Rural depopulation has had many repercussions, especially for government and others who strive to provide the same level of service with fewer local human and financial resources. The church faces similar challenges.

Redefining rural ministry

Traditional agricultural areas have been hardest hit by rural depopulation, according to Dr. John Young, Director of the Rural Ministry Program at Queen's Theological College in Kingston, Ontario. "In some parts of the prairies and southern Ontario and in the Maritimes, there is clearly rural depopulation. Where once you had four farms, now you may have only one," says Young.

"Where you have fewer people, a congregation has a smaller population base on which to draw," Young says. "This has in some cases led to the demise of congregations and the combining of others."

The changing demographics of rural agricultural regions are not unique to Canada. In the U.S., rural areas are facing similar challenges. According to their paper "Changing Demographic Profile of Rural America," authors Kirschner, E. Helen Berry and Nina Glasgow note that "throughout the 20th century, young adults in rural areas have migrated disproportionately from rural to urban areas for education and employment." The authors also point out that, while in the past higher rural birthrates offset youth out-migration, this is no longer the case. In fact, the study notes that rural birthrates have "declined more rapidly for rural than urban women beginning in the 1960s, and both rates have converged at 'below-replacement' levels."

As rural populations dwindle, pews begin to empty and churches can get discouraged. Rev. Jack Gray serves a church in an area affected by rural depopulation. "This is the first congregation I have served that is experiencing population decline in the area," he said. Gray says his church's council in Sully, Iowa, had the wisdom to see that the challenges his church was facing were unique to rural churches, encouraging him to seek out peers in similar situations for support, networking and the exchange of ideas. The result was a peer learning group dubbed "Pastors of Large Rural Churches." The peer group's goal was to study how to help rejuvenate their rural ministries.

Gray's peer group applied for, and received funding from, the Christian Reformed Church's Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Program to cover travel costs for their meetings and to bring their churches together for a conference. Gray and his peers, who hail from three different states but serve similar types of rural churches, used the book *Leading through Change, Shepherding the Town and Country Church in a New Era,* written by Barney Wells, Martin Giese and Ron Klassen, to help them rejuvenate ministry in communities that many have written off as "dying." The pastors also drew on rural church resources from Lutheran and other church denominations.

Through their studies, Gray says that he and his peers have learned that population decline doesn't have to lead to the demise of rural ministry. "The rural church needs a sense of purpose and accomplishment to keep going and keep improving," Gray says, noting that he and his peers have identified many ways in which rural churches can maintain vibrant ministries and outreach. "We can focus on reaching our near neighbours as well as supporting home and world missions. We can thank God that we are the keepers of the spring from which many young people emerge to take leadership in urban and suburban congregations. We can 'daughter' churches in growing population centres. While we cannot change our situation, we can make sure churches are available where population growth is great," says Gray. In fact, two of the congregations involved in Gray's peer group have begun church planting initiatives in nearby urban areas.

A grieving process

Young, who directs a program specializing in training pastors and lay leaders for rural ministry, notes that rural depopulation has put a strain on rural churches. Combined with the increasing secularization of our society, depopulation has made it harder for some rural churches to survive, much less thrive. "There are just fewer people involved in the life of a local congregation on a regular basis," says Young.

Young points out that these changes have caused many churches to grieve for "what used to be." "For many rural congregations, there is a sense of loss. They're dealing with grief issues. They say, 'We don't have the numbers that we used to have. We're older. We don't have as many young people,'" he says. "Churches wonder, 'Are we going to be able to keep going? Will the congregation be able to sustain itself financially, and will it continue to be a force in the local community?'"

Young would agree with Gray in saying that a redefinition of ministry is crucial for churches in areas of depopulation. "Rural churches need to stop beating themselves up because they are growing smaller," Young says. "They need to recognize that the changes they're facing are part of the broader society. They need to think less about the past and focus on what they can do in the present."

"I'm cautiously optimistic that rural churches are doing that," says Young. "Many are looking at themselves and saying, 'What do we need to do to be more proactive about our place in the community? Just because we're here doesn't mean people will come.' In our rural churches, we're starting to learn to talk to the folks moving in and introducing our churches. There is more willingness to do one-on-one evangelism than there was 20 years ago," Young says.

Rural challenges, rural strengths

Rev. Derek Bouma is a recent seminary graduate, and his first church is located in the rural heartland of Ontario's Niagara Peninsula. Through his work in Wellandport, Bouma says he learned quickly that rural ministry has its own unique challenges, but also its own strengths. While Wellandport's proximity to several major centres has protected it from rural decline, Bouma says a more sparsely populated and geographically scattered parish simply makes it more challenging for congregations to grow. On the other hand, rural congregations are deeply rooted in the community and that can be a real advantage, he notes.

"In rural settings you often have people staying for a longer period of time, and people have deeper roots within the community," Bouma says. "I find that in some ways, it does create a different atmosphere and within the church there is a real welcoming atmosphere."

"In the rural church, you have to form an identity around who you are now," says Bouma. "You have to

Continued on p. 18

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Reflections

Welcome to my perch
Bert Witvoet

Which Golden Rule is superior?

My wife and I regularly read the *National Post*, because it dares to acknowledge the value of religion. One of our favourite columnists is Barbara Kay. Barbara is a down-to-earth, wise woman who comes down hard on politically correct positions. She is a Jewish person who often aligns the Christian perspective on society with her Jewish outlook. But if pressed, she will, of course, show preference for her own faith. In a column written in May last year, she points out that Jesus was not the first person to enunciate the golden rule. She wrote: "The 'Old Testament,' as Christians call the [Jewish] Bible, proposed the golden rule in its original, and what I consider to be its superior manifestation. 'Do not do unto others that which you would not have done to you.' This was around 1,200 years before Jesus."

A friendly challenge

Her statement intrigued me, so I decided to write her a letter, not to the editor but to her in person via her email address. I wrote:

"Hello Barbara, My wife and I always enjoy your columns. We appreciate your unapologetic, no-nonsense spiritual approach to social issues. You speak frankly about your Judaic convictions, which we as Judeo-Christians affirm. Your column "Goodness Comes From God" evoked such affirmation from us. In your column you referred to the golden rule as pronounced by Jesus, and you rightly pointed out that he was not the first to articulate it. As a Jewish rabbi, Jesus was, of course, steeped in the Torah. So he would have been familiar with the original version: 'Do not do unto others that which you would not have done unto you.' Jesus would have been the first to acknowledge his debt to the Hebrew source.

"But now I have a question for you. You call the original version a 'superior manifestation.' Why? I always saw them as two sides of the same coin. Both ask us to treat the other person as if that person were ourselves. But if I had to choose one I consider superior, I would choose the positive version, because the positive means you add a good thing to someone's condition, whereas the negative version means you leave a person in her present condition by not afflicting her with an unpleasant experience.

Now, I know you're not a push-over so I expect a spirited explanation from you that will topple my assumption.

With kind regards, Bert Witvoet, Editor of the *Christian Educators Journal.*"

More accessible

Barbara replied as follows: "Hi Bert, and thanks for the warm words. My original version (which got edited) explained why I think the negative version, although seemingly less idealistic, is actually far more practicable, and accessible even to a child's mind. When you think about it, it is hard to know how far one should go in treating people the way one would like to be treated (hey, maybe I'd like to get a massage every day, does that mean I have to give them out?), but everyone knows instinctively what they would find hurtful, disrespectful, scary, or unkind. Even a little child can be told that he must not hurt others because he doesn't like to be hurt, but no child can realistically be expected to give his toys away, right? Anyway, I believe in commandments that help us engage in the kind of behaviours that make society run in a healthy, orderly way. The negative commandment may not lead to saintliness, but it will lead to an environment in which more idealistic notions can be promoted. Don't forget, the Torah also contains the greatest of all commandments, "Love thy neighbour as thyself" and "love ye the stranger, for you were strangers." If any other religion has anything to beat that, let them come forward! So that's my answer. Thanks for your attentive reading.

Barbara"

Different theologies

My answer followed:

"Hi Barbara, Thanks for that. I don't disagree with you, except to say that if the more practical commandment needs the backup of the more positive and idealistic commandment, doesn't that make them partners rather than competitors? The Ten Commandments are also stated in the negative, which supports your argument. But then Jesus says that love fulfils the commandments, and the Torah would not disagree with that. I agree that no religion can beat the Jewish religion on the matter of how we are supposed to treat our neighbour. I guess I am both Judaic and Christian on that one.

Bert."

Barbara's reply was brief: "Partners in all but actual theology. B."

And that ended our conversation. I did not think I should continue the conversation or have the last word. Besides, her cryptic reply indicated that she had no interest in taking it any further.

It's true, of course, that our theologies differ, although Christianity does not stand in contrast to the Jewish faith. Judaism is the foundation on which Christianity rests. But from the Jewish perspective, the addition of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Messianic promise in the Old Testament is, as Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 1:23, "a stumbling block to the Jew," also to Barbara Kay. We are partners in all but the cross of Jesus.

Hard-nosed pragmatism

I was not satisfied that Barbara had made a convincing case for her position that the negative version of the golden rule is superior to the positive one. In fact, she had bolstered the negative version by pointing to the positive love commandment. Her reasoning that the negative version is more practicable comes out of a religion that basically seeks to be sanctified through works. And since she feels that the positive golden rule is too idealistic and more difficult to apply, she settles for what will work better.

Her reference to children rings true for me. Children sometimes need to hear what they should not do, and need to have clear commandments spelled out for them. It's almost as if children are saved by works. That's okay, because they are, in fact, saved by grace, mainly through their believing parents. But my discussion with Barbara assumed that we are dealing with the question how especially adults should treat each other.

But I tell you….

The positive golden rule as presented by Jesus takes us a notch higher than does the negative Old Testament rule. It reminds me of what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. He repeatedly says, "You have heard it said," referring to the Old Testament teachings, and then he sets the standard even higher, as in: "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Barbara might prefer the practicable standard of not having sexual relations with another person when you're married.

Jesus also said, "You've heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good." That most certainly is not the Jewish way of thinking. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"? You're a dreamer, Jesus. You're not realistic. Come down from the mountain and face the reality of suicide bombers and terrorists!

Amazing grace

But Jesus' standards represent the foolishness of the gospel which we as Christians treasure so much. That foolishness is what makes Jesus so special and so amazing. It matches the superlative outcome of the parable of the prodigal son. Amazing grace poured out over a good-for-nothing punk who wasted his inheritance, but worse than that, who spurned his Father's deep, deep love for him, until the reality of the pigsty brought him to his senses. Too late by the world's standards, but not in the economy of the cross. "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived these things God has prepared for those who [don't deserve his love]."

Jesus, your golden rule glitters like the bright Morning Star.

Bert Witvoet is the former editor of CC, now retired, who stays active by editing the Christian Educators Journal *and preaching the occasional sermon. He tries to stay informed by hearing and reading the daily news and Reformed by looking for writers and speakers who can tell the forest from the trees.*

Rural depopulation

...continued from p. 17

ask, 'How do we do church now that we're smaller? How can we use that small size to our advantage?'"

Gray and his peers are learning to harness that advantage – and to see that smaller can still be powerful. "In five years, Sully CRC may be smaller," he says. "But we will also be leaner and more mobilized for ministry. Our focus is sharper, our vision clearer, and God's desire and agenda for us more easily understood."

Resources for Rural Churches

- *Leading through Change, Shepherding the Town and Country Church in a New Era,* Barney Wells, Martin Giese and Ron Klassen
- The Rural Ministry Program at Queen's Theological College, training and courses for pastors and lay leaders. For more information, visit: http://www.queensu.ca/theology/Rural_Min/RuralMinistry_Page.shtml
- 7th Annual Rural Ministry Symposium, "*Transformation in the Rural Community and the Rural Church"* (**October 27-29, 2008) in Jackson's Point, Ontario.** For more information or to be placed on a mailing list to receive the 2008 Rural Ministry Symposium brochure and registration form, please contact Dr. John Young at 613.533.6000x74327 or john.young@queensu.ca or check www.queenstheologicalcollege.ca.

Classifieds

Dutch Immigration ... continued from p. 13

students. The commitment of immigrants to Christian education included high schools and colleges; many potential students were advised to study for the ministry by an enthusiastic CRC pastor in Vancouver, sometimes with problematic results.

Some of Amelink's chapters go to an amazing amount of historical detail. The brouhaha regarding the discussion of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* at the Toronto District Christian High School brought out other tensions in the Reformed community – imagine immigrants getting hot and bothered about "De ketcher in de rij"! (ch. 12). The concerns of a traditional section of the CRC about the state of the church in the Netherlands and about the direction of the CRC is described in detail (ch. 13). While Amelink's grasp of these tensions is admirable, many members of the CRC experience them as long ago – even if they are not – and we in the west are also quite content to leave them to be fought out in Ontario.

Chapter 9 discusses the effect that the commitment of immigrants to the idea of societal segement, based on various worldviews, would have in Canada. In all of this, the iconoclastic person and ideas of H. Evan Runner, Professor of Philosophy at Calvin College, would play an important role. Nevertheless, it should be clear that the idea of segments in Canada is a misnomer, because Reformed Dutch immigrants represented a small fish in a big pool in Canada. The idea did lead to the formation of Christian organizations, some of which have boomed and died, but many of which are still successful, and much less ethnically defined than their organizers could ever have dreamed of; I'm thinking of such organizations at the Canadian Labour Association of Canada and Christian Farmers of Ontario – which has had excellent input on the topic of agricultural land use in Ontario. Educational institutions, such as Christian high schools and universities are doing well in Canada; less than 50 percent of students at most of these institutions have Dutch surnames, and many of the ones that do don't consider themselves Dutch. But the group of older folks, reminiscing in Chapter 14, do not need to be despondent; their legacy lives on in organizations and institutions that are committed to the idea that one's Christianity should make a difference in the life one lives. This Amelink also describes well.

But what of the Christian Reformed Churches themselves? The author describes three churches, each of which has its own struggles and idiosyncrasies. Like some other city churches, Maranatha CRC in Edmonton is challenged by demographics – an aging congregation in an aging part of town – and by the nearness of other CRCs. Neerlandia is a different case altogether: a country church to which people drive in for miles around. The community has the reputation of being theologically engaged and doctrinally opinionated – visiting pastors would often get an assessment of their sermon right after the morning service. Yes, the CRC in Neerlandia has split into three large denominations, but I also know the people there to be caring, outgoing, and involved in all kinds of relief projects. Amelink also describes the involvement of some churches in Grand Rapids in their racially mixed neighbourhoods.

In all of this, Amelink hits the nail on the head! I have only one critique. From her book one gets the impression that the Reformed churches in Canada are going the way of the declining mother churches in The Netherlands. She correctly describes how these Canadian churches are becoming more ethnically diverse. She could have described any one of the growing CRC churches that are found all over Canada. I belong to a CRC in Edmonton that has many young families. With the worship wars behind it, and with the Reformed view that one's faith makes a difference in how one leads one's life today, this church is bringing the vision of immigrants into the present. The CRC has its own future, its own vision, and its own failures and successes.

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Classifieds

Birthdays

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Japke VanderHoek-Reitsma (nee **Dijkstra**)

born **March 8, 1918**

(*...planted in the house of the Lord...*"Psalm 92:15)

We praise God for his goodness and all the blessings bestowed on our beloved mother, grandmother (Beppe) and great-grandmother.

You are welcome to join us for an **Open House Celebration** (*Lord willing*)
Saturday, March 8, 2008
2:00-4:00 p.m.
Durham Christian Homes Auditorium
Whitby, Ont.

Love and best wishes from your children:
William Reitsma, Joe & Alida Reitsma, Richard & Margie Reitsma, Pete & Wilma Reitsma, Margaret & Ron Rupke, Jerry & Henny Reitsma, Jane & Jasper Hoogendam, Helen & Chris Campbell, Mary & Dan Rupke.
Also loved by 32 grandchildren & 27 great-grandchildren!

Corresponding address: Durham Christian Homes
Apt. 511-100 Glenhill Drive, Whitby ON L1N 8R4

We are thankful to God for his faithfulness to our mom

Nell Vermeer-deBruijn

as she celebrates her **80th Birthday** on March 4.

Come and join us as we celebrate this happy occasion.
We will have an **Open House** on **Saturday, March 8th** from **2-4 p.m.** at Grace Christian Reformed Church located at 660 South Pelham Rd in Welland.
Best Wishes only please.

Happy Birthday Mom! Thanks for all you do, you have been such a blessing to us all!

Love your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Home address: 684 South Pelham Rd
Welland ON L3C 3C8

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"Genesis 12:2b"

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Waterdown, ON
Rob and Grace Nyman
Troy, ON
Evelyn and Harry Veenstra
Bloomfield, ON

Much love and best wishes from all your grandchildren as well.

We welcome you to celebrate this wonderful occasion with us at an
Open House
on Saturday, March 8, 2008
from 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. at the
Community Centre at
Wellington on the Lake.
Please let your presence be your gift on this special day!

Home address:
5 Reynolds Place
Wellington ON K0K 3L0

Obituaries

Amstelveen, Holland — Shelburne, Ontario
July 6, 1934 — January 23, 2008

I lift up my eyes to the hills
Where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
The Maker of heaven and earth.

Nicolaas Hein Schaafsma

went home to be with his Lord.

Beloved husband of
Ria Schaafsma-Spierenburg for 47 years.
Loving father of
Michael Schaafsma, *Kitchener, Ontario*
Mark & Tina Schaafsma, *Erin, Ontario*
Dear Opa of Deanna, Josiah and Caleb

A celebration of Nico's life was held on January 26, 2008 at the Christian Reformed Church in Orangeville.

Correspondence address: Ria Schaafsma
486077- 30th Side Road RR 1, Shelburne ON L0N 1S5

Catharina DeGier

Mom went peacefully to be with her Lord on January 13, 2008 at the age of 78.
Beloved wife of the late Gerald DeGier.

Loving mother of: John & Diane
Margaret & John Arkema
Gerry & Diane
Joe & Susan
Wes & Rita
Cathy & Will Janssen
Ray & Susan

Oma will be sadly missed by
24 grandchildren & 9 great-grandchildren.

Correspondence may be forwarded to:
J. DeGier, 503-330 Mill St S
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or email peptom@hotmail.com.
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Bethel Christian Reformed Church of Dunnville is seeking a part-time gifted individual to direct our Ministries. Areas of responsibility include leadership training, Spiritual Gift classes, creating and maintaining a Gift Bank, and implementing new programs. The successful candidate must be committed to the Reformed Faith with a willingness to become a member of Bethel Church, capable of providing Biblical Leadership, able to work effectively within a team, have skills in administration, organization and oral/written communication, computer skills essential.
A full job description is available upon request from BethelCRC@mountaincable.net.

Mail resume to: Bethel CRC
PO Box 96, Dunnville ON N1A 2X1
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email BethelCRC@mountaincable.net

WORSHIP COORDINATOR POSITION

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Classifieds / Job Opportunities

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Direct general inquiries and applications to:

Dr. Jacob P. Ellens, Vice President, Academic
Redeemer University College
777 Garner Road East
Ancaster, ON L9K 1J4 Canada
jellens@redeemer.ca

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Dordt College

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Candidates with a strong commitment to a Reformed, biblical faith and the mission of Dordt College, and an interest in working with students, faculty and staff on a Christian campus should send a cover letter and resume to Susan Droog, Director of Human Resources, Dordt College, 498 Fourth Ave. NE, Sioux Center, IA 51250. Phone (712) 722-6011. Fax (712) 722-1198. E-mail: kharmel@dordt.edu. A review of applications received will begin immediately and continue until the position is filled. Please contact us if you have questions about any of these positions. We will be happy to send you more complete details.

Contact: Human Resources, Dordt College
498 Fourth Ave. NE, Sioux Center, IA 51250
Email: kharmel@dordt.edu
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Classifieds

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Christian Courier is published on alternate Mondays. Copy deadline for each issue is 9 a.m. Tuesday, 13 days prior to publication date.

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Communication
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Criminal Justice
Teach in an interdisciplinary criminal justice program. Applicants should have professional experience and degree in the field. Background in sociology, political science or public administration desirable.

Economics
Teach introductory and advanced economics courses within a Business Administration program.

Education
Teach courses in special education, ESL, and teaching methods, and supervise student teachers.

English (Half-time)
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Music (Possible)
Band, orchestra, and instrumental music education courses.

Physics/Astronomy
Teach introductory and advanced courses.

Psychology (Possible)
Teach introductory and advanced research-focused courses (e.g., Learning, Biopsychology, I/O, Statistics).

Visual Arts
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To learn more about a position and receive application materials, qualified persons committed to a Reformed, biblical perspective and educational philosophy are encouraged to send a letter of interest and curriculum vita/resume to:

Dr. Rockne McCarthy
Vice President for Academic Affairs
Dordt College
498 4th Ave. NE
Sioux Center, IA 51250-1697

Facsimile: 712 722-1198
E-mail: vpaa@dordt.edu
Web site: www.dordt.edu/offices/academic_affairs

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Classifieds

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ALBERTA		
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MANITOBA		
Winnipeg – CKJS	9:00 am	810
ONTARIO		
Atikokan – CFAK	9:30 am	1240
Chatham – CFCO	6:30 am	630
Hamilton – CHAM	7:30 am	820
London – CKSL	7:00 am	1410
Owen Sound – CFOS	7:00 am	560
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Stratford – CJCS	8:45 am	1240
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Annual Inter-Classis Safe Church Abuse Prevention Response Training

This workshop will be of interest to Youth Leaders, Elders, Deacons, Abuse Response Team members, and all those who have leadership positions in the Christian Community, and who desire to learn more about abuse dynamics.

Date: Saturday March 1, 2008 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Location: Waterloo CRC ***209 Bearinger Road, Waterloo ON N2L 4H5*** **Ph: 519-746-5727**

See Calendar of Events

Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS - 2008

Feb 24 Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. John Klomps will be preaching.

March 1 Annual Inter-Classis Safe Church Abuse Prevention Response Training. Location: **Waterloo** CRC, Waterloo ON To register call/email Atie Ott or online Phone: 519-576-0965 Email: wmott@uwaterloo.ca Web: www.ece.uwaterloo.ca/~wmott/scc

March 13 Noon-hour Organ Recital, Jonathan Oldengarm organist, at St. Paul's Anglican Church, 227 Bloor St. East, **Toronto**. Free admission. Program will feature works by Franck, Guillou, and Reger. For more information call: 416-961-8116. Website: www.oldengarm.com.

March 29 - Hamilton - 25th Anniversary Concert by the 130 voice of the Hosanna Choir at Hamilton Place at 7:30 pm. Guests inlcude the Mattaniah Male Choir, Liselotte Rokyta - panflute and many others. All under the direction of Herman den Hollander. Tickets are $10 and $15, available at ticketmaster* outlets, CoppsColliseum Box office,ticketmaster.ca* or charge by phone at 905-527-7666,416-870-8000*(*convenience fee at ticketmaster)or contact the choir at 905-628-1211visit www.hosanna-choir.org

March 29 Missions Conference at Bethel CRC, **Waterdown** for local church leaders, missions advocates, and short term missions participants. For registration information visit Christian Reformed World Missions at www.crwm.org or contact John & Margaret den Otter 905-331-3205 or jdenotter@cogeco.ca

April 19, 20 Maranatha CRC, **Cambridge** 50th anniversary. Celebrations and special events will be held on Saturday April 19 at 7 p.m. and Sunday April 20 during the 10 a.m. service.

May 2-4 Marriage encounter weekend in **London**, ON. For more information or to register on-line, go to **www.reformedme.org** or contact Chris & Cindy Otten at 519-393-5163 or by email at Ontario_Registration@reformedme.org.

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News

Pakistan: Musharraf allies' election prospects fade

Mark Sappenfield

LAHORE, PAKISTAN – A crowd has gathered around Sitara Begum. With sarcasm and desperation, she pronounces that she will give her vote in the Feb. 18 parliamentary elections to anyone who can give her a portion of clarified cooking butter. Onlookers laugh, not mocking but commiserating.

Imraz Khan (with a tan sweater and parted hair) suggests that inflation and terrorism are linked, with the poor turning increasingly desperate – and against the Pakistani government, whom they blame for the situation. Inflation, combined worsening electricity and security, has turned many people against Musharraf, and could result in a defeat for his allies in parliament during the Feb. 18 elections, experts say.

The election campaign is now getting under way in earnest, with slain leader Benazir Bhutto's party planning its first campaign rally Saturday, now that the 40-day ritual mourning period has ended. But as the world worries about terrorism, across Pakistan that fear is mixed with other, more basic concerns: how to afford dinner or stay warm amid inflation and hours-long power outages.

These are the issues – largely overlooked outside Pakistan – that are perhaps most likely to motivate Pakistanis on election day. Interviews here as well as opinion polls suggest that Pakistanis want new leadership. While they have no great hope that anyone else is the solution, they agree it is time to give someone other than President Pervez Musharraf and his allies a chance.

"Because of the high prices of commodities, people have changed their priorities and want to vote for some other party," says Mohammed Akram, standing in front of the government store, wrapped in a red checkered scarf to ward off the cold. "This government has cast off the poor."

The discontent hints at what could become Musharraf's next crisis. As president, he is not competing in these elections. But the parliamentary allies that have ruled alongside him for the past five years could take the brunt of the public's anger, and if they are the big losers Feb. 18 – as many experts predict – that would leave Musharraf without support in a hostile parliament.

For example, if the major opposition parties – Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) – combine to win more than two-thirds of the seats, they could try to sideline Musharraf or perhaps even remove him from office. This would be Musharraf's greatest incentive to tamper with the election results, experts say, to give himself some political cover or even to propel his supporters in the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) to victory.

PML-Q leaders say they have strong support in the rural areas of Pakistan's most populous and powerful state, Punjab. They say they can win 100 of 272 seats being contested in these polls – or 36 percent – enough to make them essentially the winners, given the number of parties contesting.

"PML-Q thinks that [Musharraf] is supportive of their top leadership, so they have mutual support for each other," says Talat Masood, a former Army general who is now an independent analyst in Islamabad.

But many analysts refute the party's optimism and say its strategy is a convenient one. Rural Punjab would be the easiest place to rig elections, where the writ of the current government is strongest, says Shafqay Mahmood, a columnist for *The News*, a national newspaper.

Flour, fuel are harder to get

On the streets of Lahore, many Pakistanis blame the government for the mounting problems. Shortages of staples like flour have led to nearly 9 percent inflation in the past year, and – in some cases – hour-long lines at government-subsidized Utility Stores like the one Ms. Begum has just left, empty-handed. In some rural areas, power outages last for 18 hours a day.

Mohammed Ahmed standing in front of a delivery truck at one of the government-subsidized 'Utility Stores' in Lahore. He blames the policies of the Musharraf government for the shortages and says he would not vote for Musharraf's allies on Feb. 18.

Security has deteriorated dramatically. The number of bombings has risen in recent months, and many Pakistanis believe Musharraf's government was at worst complicit and at best negligent in the Dec. 27 assassination of Ms. Bhutto. Two suspects were arrested, bringing the total number of suspects to four. Together, these concerns have turned many Pakistanis against Musharraf. A Gallup Pakistan poll released last month found that 68 percent of respondents wanted the president to resign.

"Commodities are out of range of the common person," says Mohammed Saeed as he loads a scooter with bags of rice outside the Utility Store, a government subsidized outlet. "I accuse the government of these price hikes."

His is a common complaint here. While free-market reforms have brought enormous investment in the stock market, building a new middle class, the poor have been pinched. Pakistan's domestic industries, such as textiles and agriculture, have not been able to compete in an open global marketplace. This had played a part in double-digit food-price inflation over the past three years. The cost of food and drink rose 12.2 percent in December compared with the previous year. Fuel for auto rickshaws and taxis is going at twice the government-approved rate of about 50 cents a pound.

"The problem is with the government," says Mohammed Ahmed, waiting for a government store to open. "From short supply the people have to suffer." A September survey conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org found that 70 percent of Pakistanis polled felt the economy was "on the wrong track."

To be sure, some Pakistanis have prospered under Musharraf's economic liberalization and its 7-plus percent annual economic growth. "Elite businessmen who have benefited from his regime are undoubtedly supportive of him," says Mr. Masood, the analyst.

But across the country, near the unsettled tribal areas, some suggest that inflation could even be fueling the insurgency. Imraz Khan sits on an earthen wall in Peshawar, drawing a link between the growing sense of economic despair and willingness to join forces against the government. "Things will get better if Musharraf steps down and there is a new government," he says. "As inflation has gotten worse, law and order has gotten worse. They are connected."

Mark Sappenfield is a staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor. Ghulam Dastageer contributed to this report from Peshawar. Photos by Mark Sappenfield.

Pakistan's Taliban offers truce, Army demurs

Mark Sappenfield

New Delhi – In a curious development highlighting the confusion in Pakistan's tribal areas, the Taliban announced Wednesday it had declared a cease-fire with Pakistani forces. But Pakistani forces promptly denied it.

It appears that the militants in the tribal belt are maneuvering for time and space. Taliban leader Mullah Omar has recently been trying to turn the Taliban's attentions toward Afghanistan, not Pakistan. This cease-fire claim could represent an effort to call off Pakistan operations so that the Taliban can refocus and regroup.

If so, the Taliban are seeking to continue a trend that has played out repeatedly since Sept. 11, 2001: When the military has stepped in to contain unruly militants, the militants have reached cease-fires with the Army.

"In the past, these cease-fires have resulted in militants being able to bide more time, build up resources, and then make much more effective attacks," says Ahmed Rashid, author of *Taliban*.

Most notably, the Army pulled out of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) entirely after a 2006 cease-fire in exchange for a promise from tribal chiefs to expel militants. The deal is seen as a failure that allowed the number of militants to grow tremendously.

Instead of withdrawal, experts say, a cease-fire should lead to greater Pakistani engagement with tribes in FATA, which have ruled themselves with little state interference for a century. But since the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001, the remnants of the Taliban and Al Qaeda have crossed from Afghanistan into the tribal areas and supplanted local tribal chiefs. They have killed many who opposed them; most moderate tribal leaders have fled to Peshawar or Lahore.

Any solution must include restoring these moderates to power, says Mr. Rashid. "The government has not been prepared to protect [them]," he says. But if they don't return, he adds, "you are leaving the region in the hands of the militants."

The Pakistani Army's response to the supposed cease-fire, however, suggests that nothing is settled yet. "As the miscreants have stopped attacking and firing, so there is a pause," an Army official told Reuters Wednesday. "But the operation will continue."